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December 2014

A monthly review *edited by Roger Kimball*

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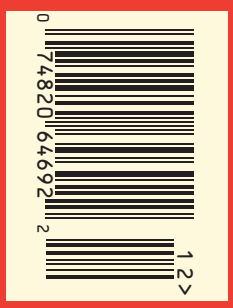

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Notes & Comments
December 2014

Feminism & astrophysics

Gertrude Stein once remarked that it is important to know how far to go in going too far. It is curious that certain radical "feminists"—that is, the relentlessly vindictive sorority which, since the 1960s, has made such a nuisance of itself on college campuses and other protected purlieus of affluent Western societies—have always had difficulty following Stein's advice. What makes it curious, of course, is that Stein is such an iconic figure for their coven. *Tender Buttons* (get it?). Alice B. Toklas. "A rose is a rose is a rose." Can't you hear the pulpit tones wafting up from those phrases? And yet when Stein got around to dispensing a practical, real-life admonition, they completely ignore her. They *never* know how far to go in going too far.

What prompts these uncharitable thoughts is the saga, much in the news as we write, of Dr. Matt Taylor. Taylor is the forty-something British-born astrophysicist who is project scientist for the European Space Agency's Rosetta Mission. Earlier this year, there were hosannas when Taylor and his colleagues successfully brought the Rosetta spacecraft, which had been tootling around the solar system for a decade, out of hibernation. That success prompted the exuberant rocket scientist to have a tattoo of Rosetta and Philae, its landing probe, inscribed upon his leg. Last month, the Rosetta team engineered an even greater triumph. After guiding Rosetta on a journey of some four *billion* miles, they were in (virtual) sight of their holy grail, comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko. The comet—at 2.8 miles long, a veritable flyspeck in the real estate of outer space—was hurtling through space at some 41,000 miles per hour. It was 311 million miles from Earth. Nevertheless, Taylor and his team managed to detach Philae from its mother ship, remotely guide it towards Mr. 67P/C-G, and *land the probe on the speeding comet*. This was the first time in history, as the British politician Boris Johnson put it, that a representative of humanity had paid a visit to the surface of a comet. Slick work, eh?

A few days after this stupendous feat of engineering and scientific bravado, Dr. Taylor went on television to say a few words about the mission. He was clearly overcome by emotion. But it soon became evident that he was stirred not by feelings of relief and triumph but of mortification. Choking back tears, he leaned forward towards the microphone and—apologized.

Apologized. Why? Because *The Atlantic*'s tech writer Rose Eveleth and an angry horde of feminists didn't like what he was wearing when he first broke the news of the landing. Yes, that's right: they didn't like his shirt, so they mounted a social media attack on the hapless scientist. Quoth Eveleth: "No no women are toooootally welcome in our

community, just ask the dude in this shirt." Other hysterics on the distaff side followed suit, as did *New Yorker* blogger James DiGioia who sniffed: "Technology advances while society remains decidedly retrograde."

The commentator Glenn Reynolds got to the nub of the matter when, writing in *USA Today*, he noted that "some feminists took one of the great achievements of human history . . . and made it all about the clothes." It was, Reynolds continued, "one small shirt for a man, one giant leap backward for womankind."

So what about that shirt? What was so offensive? You can easily find pictures of Dr. Taylor in his shirt on the internet. It's a brightly colored Hawaiian-style number festooned with cartoon-like drawings of scantily clad, gun-toting women, made for him by a close female friend (whose business, we are happy to report, has boomed). It is straight out of a 1950s Sci-Fi adventure story: *Out of This World*, *Space Detective*, and let's not forget *Attack of the 50-ft Woman*. Do you find such things offensive? We don't. They're not lewd. Merely, well, nerdy. Such vivid garments may or may not be to your taste—they are not to ours—but then tattoos of spaceships may or may not be to your taste either.

Ask yourself this: Was this shirt as insulting as heaping pseudo-moral obloquy upon a great scientist in his hour of triumph because you happen to disapprove, or at least you pretend to disapprove, of images of girls on his shirt? We agree with Mr. Johnson, who had this to say in his column for the *Daily Telegraph*: "I think his critics should go to the National Gallery and look at the *Rokeby Venus* by Velázquez. Or look at the stuff by Rubens. Are we saying that these glorious images should be torn from the walls?" Or torn just from the chests of brilliant scientists who indulge in a bit of whimsy when it comes to their haberdashery? "What are we all," Johnson asked, "a bunch of Islamist maniacs who think any representation of the human form is an offence against God? This is the 21st century, for goodness' sake. And if you ask yourself why so few have come to the defence of the scientist, the answer is that no one dares."

The whole thing is so silly that one might be tempted to dismiss it as a freakish exception and move on. But, as many victims of political correctness of our college campuses know to their sorrow, it is anything but innocent. Dr. Taylor's humiliation, as Mr. Johnson noted,

> was like something from the show trials of Stalin, or from the sobbing testimony of the enemies of Kim Il-sung, before they were taken away and shot. It was like a scene from Mao's cultural revolution when weeping intellectuals were forced to confess their crimes against the people.
>
> Why was he forced into this humiliation? Because he was subjected to an unrelenting tweetstorm of abuse. He was bombarded across the internet with a hurtling dust-cloud of hate, orchestrated by lobby groups and politically correct media organisations.

The whole episode stinks of rancid politically correct animus. Critics who have described the event as "political correctness gone mad" are not wrong. But it is worth noting that the case of Dr. Taylor is by no means the only such outrage. On the contrary, the commissars of political correctness have been emboldened over the last couple of decades as they have succeeded in one case after another in using race or sex to bully their opponents into submission. Cast your mind back to the episode of Larry Summers. In 2005, Summers, then the President of Harvard University, fresh from locking horns with one of academia's most prominent charlatans and race-baiters, Cornel West, found himself speaking at a conference at MIT on "Diversifying the Science & Engineering Workforce." Summers speculated on why there are not more women scientists at elite universities. He touched on several possibilities: maybe "patterns of discrimination" had something

to do with it. Maybe most women preferred to put their families before their careers. Or maybe, as Summers asserted in an "attempt to be provocative" and to ignite a more open discussion about underrepresentation, it had something to do with "different availability of aptitude at the high end."

What a storm that last comment sparked! "I felt I was going to be sick," wailed Nancy Hopkins, a professor of biology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who then walked out on Summers. "My heart was pounding and my breath was shallow," Hopkins trembled. "I was extremely upset." Whatever happened to strong women? What would Margaret Thatcher have done?

That bout of hysteria did for Larry Summers, who was shortly thereafter ignominiously forced from the presidency of Harvard because he had inadvertently trespassed upon the delicate feelings of some touchy feminists.

Why is it acceptable for celebrities or other certified feminist icons to prance around in pornographic splendor when men are expected to behave with Mrs. Grundyesque rectitude? And why is the former "empowering" while any deviation from the latter is "sexist"? Why is it that these self-appointed moral guardians and professional feminists are always looking for a whipping post? Why don't they just get on with their work: *do* something to command admiration rather than screaming murder at every unsanctioned statement? Look just beyond America's horizons—there one can surely find women who deserve the defense of an angry horde. How about the women in Egypt, for example, where more than 90 percent over age fifteen are subjected to the barbaric practice of genital mutilation?

The case of Dr. Taylor's shirt may seem like little more than a bad joke. In fact, it is something more sinister. It is a vivid example of what happens when a self-enfranchised politically correct cadre sets about quashing freedom and eccentricity in the name of an always-evolving sensitivity. The goal, as one wag put it, is a testosterone-free society in which everything that is not mandatory is prohibited. Which is why the Rose Eveleths and Nancy Hopkinses of the world are victimizers, not victims, and their brand of feminism is an atavistic, tribal ideology as harmful to women as it is to men.

The New Criterion *on art*

For more than a decade, we have devoted a large portion of our December issue to the visual arts. We do so again this year, with a number of reviews and essays assembled by our Executive Editor James Panero on a wide variety of subjects, from the cut-outs of Henri Matisse to the "new" New Brutalism in architecture to how the Brooklyn Museum has failed Brooklyn art. Marco Grassi accompanies Philippe de Montebello, the former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, around some of the world's great museums, and Victoria Coates meditates on the way democracies throughout the ages have enlisted art in their pursuit of the ideal of responsible self-governance. Readers alarmed by the skyrocketing cost of visiting many museums today will be interested in the cold eye Daniel Grant casts upon that unedifying phenomenon, while anyone concerned about the fate of our public spaces will want to turn to the astringent essay by Bruce Cole, the former Director of the National Endowment for the Humanities, who anatomizes Frank Gehry's proposed travesty for a monument honoring Dwight D. Eisenhower in Washington, D.C. We are pleased once again to be able to bring such a cornucopia of incisive reflections on art to our readers. In years gone by, this special section was made possible by support from some of our co-conspirators, including the late Helen Frankenthaler, a dear friend of *The New Criterion*. This year, we are deeply grateful for the generous interventions of Bobbie Foshay, Alex and Mary Ross, and the J. M. Foundation, which made our special section on art possible. Thank you one and all.

Abraham Lincoln: American prophet

by James Piereson

Several decades ago, the Civil War historian James G. Randall raised the question as to whether the Lincoln theme in American history had been exhausted by the vast outpouring of books on the life and lives of our sixteenth president. He need not have worried: There was never any danger that Americans would tire of hearing about Abraham Lincoln or that historians and biographers would run out of things to say about him.

Lincoln, after all, is a central figure—perhaps *the* central figure—in the unfolding epic of the American nation. What we are today we might never have been had Lincoln not intervened in the sectional conflict of the 1850s. There was also something about the rough-hewn man from the prairie that set him apart from the secular statesmen who founded the nation and the patronage-seeking and media-savvy politicians who followed him. Unpolished, unschooled, and untutored, he somehow managed to master a situation that, as he said, was "piled high with difficulty," and he did so with a rhetorical mastery that no other American political figure has come close to matching. The coarse photographs from the era, while giving us a clearer sense of his contemporaries, seem mainly to illustrate Lincoln's fundamental elusiveness. "That son of a gun Lincoln grows on you," observed Carl Sandburg in 1939 upon completing his magisterial biography of Lincoln. He "grows on us" still.

Sandburg pointed to the central difficulty faced by anyone trying to articulate a definitive interpretation of Lincoln. There were too many sides to the man: homespun hero, storyteller, debater, politician and party leader, writer and rhetorician, statesman, perhaps a villain (in the eyes of some), martyr, and prophet of American liberty. Who was the "real" Lincoln? That is a matter of serious debate, even now a full century and a half after he was assassinated. By now, most historians have given up trying to see Lincoln "whole," and are increasingly satisfied to understand one or another dimension of his genius.

Harold Holzer is fascinated by Lincoln's skills as a politician, and in particular by his masterful use of the press to advance his career and the Whig and anti-slavery causes with which he was associated. Holzer, a widely published Lincoln scholar and the Roger Hertog Fellow at the New-York Historical Society, may know more about Abraham Lincoln than any other living person, and it shows in his fascinating study of Lincoln's relations with the press barons of his time. In *Lincoln and the Power of the Press*, the lofty statesman and savior of the Union gives way to the shrewd prairie politician who was more adept than his better-known rivals in the use and manipulation of the press.[1]

Lincoln entered the journalistic fray early in his political career, joining with others in 1840 to finance a Whig newspaper to support William Henry Harrison's campaign for the presidency. Throughout the 1840s, he contributed unsigned articles to the local Springfield

1 *Lincoln and the Power of the Press*, by Harold Holzer; Simon & Schuster, 733 pages, $37.50.

newspaper, the *Sangamo Journal*, ridiculing Democrats and supporting Whig candidates and, in particular, the political career of Henry Clay. In this way, as Holzer writes, Lincoln could have it both ways, acting in public as a high-minded lawyer and candidate for office and behind the scenes as a bare-knuckled partisan fighter. Later, when he challenged Senator Stephen A. Douglas for his U.S. Senate seat in 1858, Lincoln arranged for *The Chicago Tribune* to call for a series of "western-style" debates over the extension of slavery into the western territories. Shortly before, Lincoln had kicked off that campaign with his "House Divided" speech before a Republican assembly in Springfield, which he had typeset for immediate distribution in the offices of the *Illinois State Journal*. During the debates with Douglas, he made a further arrangement with Joseph Medill, the editor and publisher of the *Tribune*, to send a friendly reporter to cover the exchanges, certain that Douglas would make parallel arrangements with a Democratic newspaper. The press coverage of those debates helped to turn Lincoln into a nationally prominent political figure, and also into one of the main challengers to New York's William Seward for the Republican presidential nomination in 1860.

Lincoln and the Power of the Press is a particularly valuable study for the light it shines on the openly partisan character of the American press in the mid-nineteenth century. As Holzer writes, "The press and politics often functioned in tandem as a single, tightly organized entity in furious competition to win power. " He focuses on the competition between and among three titans of mid-century journalism: Horace Greeley of the *New York Tribune*, Henry Jarvis Raymond, founding editor of *The New York Times*, and James Gordon Bennett of the *New York Herald*. Greeley, one of the original crusading journalists, was an off-again, on-again supporter of Lincoln; Raymond, who learned the newspaper trade under Greeley, was the steadier and more reliable supporter; Bennett was the vitriol-slinging inventor of the tabloid press, a fervent Democrat, opponent of Lincoln, and all-around bigot. These three established the template for journalistic competition in the 1850s and 1860s as they built loyal followings around partisan causes (not unlike journalistic enterprises today). All had political ambitions: Greeley wished openly to be designated a U.S. Senator, and attended the Republican national convention in 1860 where he maneuvered behind the scenes to deny the presidential nomination to his fellow New Yorker Seward and to deliver it to Lincoln.

The structure of politics at the time allowed politicians to court favor with journalists by holding out the prospect of patronage jobs. Following Lincoln's election in 1860, editor Bennett of the *New York Herald* sent a young writer out to Springfield to report on the President-elect's comings and goings during the months leading up to his inauguration. The journalist Henry Garrison Villard sent back regular dispatches on Lincoln's activities, noting especially the enormous amount of time taken in dispensing patronage positions. Many of these jobs, as Holzer writes in great detail, went to working journalists, all supporters of the Republican campaign, who won positions as ambassadors, postmasters, port collectors, and, in a few cases, as cabinet officers (Gideon Welles, publisher of the *Hartford Times*, became Secretary of the Navy). Greeley's *New York Tribune* was especially favored in the contest for such jobs, so much so that a writer for Bennett's *New York Herald* observed that "the *Tribune* would be depleted of writers in consequence of the necessity of the new administration for suitable men to send abroad as ambassadors and consuls." But Lincoln was not above courting Bennett himself: He intervened to promote Bennett's son to officer rank in the Navy.

Lincoln redoubled his efforts both to use and to court favor with the press during his presidential years. He leaked reports of battles and presidential orders to favored reporters and at times defended his policies toward slavery and the South in letters to editors. His famed statement—"my paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union"—was contained in a brief letter to Greeley in 1862 in response to Greeley's editorial "The Prayer of Twenty Millions," in which he (Greeley) called for the

confiscation of Southern property as a step toward the emancipation of slaves (written at a moment when Lincoln had already drafted but had not yet published his Emancipation Proclamation). Lincoln more or less left it to his generals to monitor and often censor reports from the battlefield, or in some cases even to arrest reporters or exile them from the front. When Lincoln announced stringent rules banning commercial intercourse with the South, many officials and supporters read it to apply to the distribution of news and newspapers. The Postmaster General soon banned the distribution of several Democratic newspapers through the U.S. mail. Lincoln, as Holzer acknowledges, went along with censorship of the press, though he did not necessarily encourage it, in the belief that this, like other wartime measures, was one of those temporary expedients required to save the Union.

Lincoln and the Power of the Press ought not to be read as a book on Lincoln alone, but rather as an important study—and among the best that we now have—of the partisan press during the sectional crisis and the Civil War era. It is a long book—more than 700 pages in all—but a richly rewarding one for the mass of detail it contains and the conclusions the author draws from it regarding the overlapping worlds of politics and journalism. In looking back on that era, one necessarily wonders if we have gained very much by the rise of "objective" journalism or the evolution of journalism as a profession supposedly independent of politics and political influence. Holzer's book suggests that we have not: For all its faults, the partisan press, working with the shrewdest of politicians, helped to keep the country together in a time of immense peril.

Richard Brookhiser gives us a much different perspective in *Founders' Son*, his illuminating but unconventional new biography of Abraham Lincoln.[2] Mr. Brookhiser, a senior editor at *National Review* and author of acclaimed biographies of George Washington, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton, has the credentials to take up the challenging task of saying something original about Lincoln the man and politician. As he acknowledges up front, this is not a conventional biography that takes us step-by-step through his subject's life but rather an interpretation that seeks to ground Lincoln's career in a handful of fundamental assumptions and principles. It is, as he writes, *a* life of Lincoln, not *the* life. For the most part, he succeeds brilliantly in giving us a new and original perspective on Lincoln's statesmanship. His prose is spare and robust (the author has been schooled by Lincoln) and even readers who know little of Lincoln will find the treatment entirely readable, enjoyable, and persuasive.

Brookhiser's central argument is that Lincoln, in challenging the expansion of slavery into the western territories, understood himself to be vindicating the intentions of the founding fathers and in the process saving the Constitution and the experiment they launched in popular government. It was in this sense that he was the "founders' son." As Brookhiser writes, "The founding fathers inspired Lincoln to take up public life [and] showed him how to win arguments. They gave Lincoln direction, which bound all his talents . . . together." Lincoln, who had a cool relationship with his biological father, found inspiration in his life as a public figure from the exemplary deeds of the nation's fathers. From Lincoln's point of view, the Southerners who would rend the union to extend slavery were disloyal sons in rebellion against the teachings of the fathers.

Among the founding fathers, Lincoln focused especially on two Virginians: Washington and Jefferson, slaveholders both. Washington was ever Lincoln's model as a patriot, statesman, and self-made man. He read Parson Weems's *The Life of George Washington* as a young boy and from that point forward molded his career and his understanding of patriotic duty around Washington's example. As president, Washington confronted disunion and disloyalty on a small scale in the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794. If Lincoln was the "founders' son," then it was Washington who was first among his fathers. Toward Jefferson, however, he had an ambivalent posture. On the one

2 *Founders' Son: A Life of Abraham Lincoln*, by Richard Brookhiser; Basic Books, 347 pages. $27.99.

hand, Jefferson authored the Declaration of Independence, in Lincoln's view the nation's central founding document, and he had the foresight to insert into it the fundamental principle that "all men are created equal." On the other hand, Jefferson never followed through on that principle in his deeds as national leader and spokesman for the founding generation. He carried on (as Lincoln thought) sexual affairs with his female slaves. He argued that slavery should be "diffused" among the western territories, a position that Lincoln rejected and, indeed, devoted his political career to defeating. Jefferson idealized the yeoman farmer and hoped the United States would evolve as an agrarian republic. Lincoln abandoned his father's small farm as soon as he reached manhood and looked forward to an American future based upon trade and industry.

Lincoln seemed to have worked out in his mind his relationship to the founding fathers and even his own role in the sectional crisis long before it broke open in the 1850s. Brookhiser calls attention to a prescient speech Lincoln gave in 1838 to the Young Men's Lyceum in Springfield on the subject of "The Perpetuation of our Political Institutions." In that speech, the young Lincoln raised the question as to where Americans might look for threats to their free institutions. Lincoln assumed that because of geographical factors the danger to the Union could never come from abroad. "If destruction be our lot," he said, "we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of free men, we must live through all time or die by suicide." The main source of danger, he argued, was the "increasing disregard for law that pervades the country and the disposition to substitute wild and furious passions in lieu of the sober judgment of courts"—this a reference to a recent case in which the editor of an abolitionist newspaper had been murdered near St. Louis and his printing press tossed into a river. (Lincoln was already sensitive to the political threats to journalistic freedom.) Mob rule and disregard for law, Lincoln argued, if permitted to continue, would eventually destroy the attachment of the people to their government and bring to an end the experiment the founders had launched. In some way, he suggested, slavery would be at the bottom of this future revolt.

In Lincoln's prophecy, the rebellion against law and order would eventually open up an opportunity for a dictator in the model of a Caesar or a Napoleon to arise and overturn the fabric of constitutional government created by the founding fathers. Men of "towering genius," he said, disdain the beaten path and "scorn to tread in the footsteps of any predecessor, however illustrious." They thirst for distinction and, as he said, "would have it, either at the expense of emancipating slaves or enslaving freemen." His solution to the crisis he foresaw was to urge Americans to defend their free institutions by cultivating a reverence for the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and by creating a "political religion" around the works of the founding fathers. Such a national religion, he thought, would bind Americans to their republican institutions and thereby enable them to fight off impending threats from men of "towering genius." In the young Lincoln's political theology, reverence for the founding fathers was the foundation of self-government, the "rock" upon which the nation was built.

Lincoln spent the next sixteen years building up his law practice in Springfield and pursuing an episodic career in politics (he served one term in Congress) as a member of the Whig Party and supporter of Henry Clay. As Brookhiser suggests, Lincoln might have been content to continue on such a path if his premonitions about slavery had not been reawakened in 1854 by the passage of the Kansas–Nebraska Act. That legislation, engineered by Senator Douglas, sought to organize the still unsettled territories acquired via the Louisiana Purchase on the basis of popular sovereignty—a policy that gave local legislatures the authority to decide if slavery would be permitted within territorial borders. On its face, the Act seemed defensible: it took the slavery issue out of Congress where it was stalemated by the balance of Northern and Southern interests; it set forth a formula for the organization of the western territories, which was also bottled up in Congress due to discord over slavery; and it

allowed local legislatures to vote slavery "up or down" on the basis of majority opinion. Sen. Douglas, Lincoln's political adversary in Illinois, hoped to win the presidency on the basis of this ingenious compromise.

Brookhiser guides the reader through this critical chapter in Lincoln's career as he took the lead in organizing the Republican Party in opposition to the Kansas–Nebraska Act and as he followed Douglas from town to town in Illinois, setting forth his objections both to popular sovereignty and the expansion of slavery into the territories. Lincoln occasionally summarized his objections to Douglas's policy in pithy aphorisms: "If one man chooses to enslave another, no third party may be allowed to object;" or, "inasmuch as you do not object to my taking my hog to Nebraska, therefore I must not object to you taking your slave." Popular sovereignty blotted out the moral dimension of slavery, placing it on the same level as any other form of property. Lincoln claimed that the founding fathers wished to place slavery in a position that would lead to its ultimate extinction. They refused to defile the Constitution by inserting "slavery" into its text. The Declaration of Independence, he claimed, was the central pillar of the American union, and it committed the nation to an experiment in liberty and equal rights. Lincoln, expressing the central principle of the Republican Party, called upon Congress to restrict the expansion of slavery into the territories as a step toward its ultimate elimination—a position the Southerners viewed as illegitimate and which, in the *Dred Scott* decision, the Supreme Court ruled as contrary to the Constitution.

In the prelude to his historic debates with Douglas during the campaign of 1858, Lincoln said (quoting the New Testament) that "A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free." Lincoln did not think that any compromise could ever resolve the slavery question: The nation would have to pass through a grave crisis to settle it one way or another (much as he imagined in his Lyceum speech). This speech was judged by many to have been a fatal error on Lincoln's part for, as Douglas pointed out, it was more or less a forecast of disunion or civil war. The founding fathers had managed to compromise the issue, and indeed had written those compromises into the Constitution. From Douglas's point of view, it was Lincoln (not he) who had turned his back against the founders. Yet, through the course of those debates Lincoln succeeded in discrediting popular sovereignty while elevating his own stature as a national candidate and champion of the anti-slavery cause. At the same time, he managed to entice Douglas into statements that antagonized his supporters in the South, thereby producing a portentous split in the Democratic Party between its northern and southern factions.

Lincoln was mindful of the charge that in his efforts to contain slavery he was acting against the intentions of the founders—and that he might be complicit in causing the national crisis that he had forecast in his "House Divided" speech. Following his campaign against Douglas and in advance of the election of 1860, Lincoln travelled the country making the case that the founding fathers had looked upon slavery as an evil that in due course would be brought to an end by the expanding spirit of liberty. In his address at Cooper Union in New York City—perhaps the speech that sealed the presidential nomination in 1860—Lincoln traced the views of the signers of the Constitution with regard to their views on slavery, pointing out that a clear majority voted at one time or another in the Continental Congress or the U.S. Congress to restrict the spread of that institution into the new territories. This was a key point that separated Lincoln and his Party from the abolitionists on one side and the slaveholders on the other, both of whom claimed that the Constitution was an instrument for the promotion of slavery.

Brookhiser deftly takes the reader through Lincoln's election to the presidency, his confrontation with secession and disunion, and his majestic efforts to explain the tragedy of civil war to the American people. There were those in the North—Greeley, for example, and many leading Democrats—who felt that the Southern states should be allowed to go their own way. Lincoln saw secession

as simple rebellion against the Constitution and the laws: a minority cannot be permitted to break up the Union because it has lost an election. Throughout the war, as the casualties mounted, Lincoln called upon the founding fathers to justify the sacrifices required to maintain the Union—which he more and more referred to as "the nation." In the Gettysburg Address, he dated the founding of the nation to the Declaration of Independence, and explained the war as a universal test of whether any government devoted to liberty and equality could long survive; and in his Second Inaugural Address, judged by Brookhiser to have been his finest effort, he accounted for the war in biblical terms as divine punishment for both North and South for the offense of slavery. Lincoln's assassination occurred six weeks later—three days after Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox—at the hands of the itinerant actor John Wilkes Booth, described by Mr. Brookhiser as the "towering genius" of the kind Lincoln foretold in his Lyceum address (a false note perhaps: Booth was a small-scale villain, not a Napoleon or a Caesar). It is easy to see Lincoln as a radical or reformer who brought far-reaching changes to the United States. Brookhiser reminds us that those changes were brought about by Lincoln's consistent appeal to the founding fathers.

Was Lincoln the loyal son of the founders or perhaps, as some have suggested, a founder himself of a new order, with the Declaration of Independence as its central pillar? The answer is: some of both.

Richard Brookhiser makes a strong case for the first, but between the lines of his fine book one can see that Lincoln, by his leadership and rhetoric, added something startling and original of his own to the founders' experiment. In his Lyceum speech, Lincoln suggested that the basis upon which the founders built the Constitution might be insufficient to sustain it over the long run. The secular principles contained in the Declaration of Independence and Constitution were insufficient to hold back the impulses of sectionalism and abolitionism that were then gaining strength. James Madison and his colleagues relied upon institutional checks and the diversity of interests in the extended republic to keep the Union together, but Lincoln now thought that something new and additional—a civil religion—would be required to keep it from spinning apart. He lived on to act out a role in his own prophecy. In his Civil War addresses, Lincoln acknowledged that the founders' formula had not worked after all. The nation was in need of "a new birth of freedom," one sanctified by the sacrifices made to save the Union and sustained by a quasi-religious understanding of the founders' experiment in republican government. By his timely death at the close of the war, Lincoln became a symbol of the cause he championed—and by this means a subject of inexhaustible curiosity for Americans down to the present day.

A monumental shame
by Bruce Cole

In 1999, two powerful senators, Ted Stevens and Daniel Inouye, both World War II veterans (Inouye was a Medal of Honor recipient), sponsored legislation to build a memorial in Washington, D.C., to Dwight Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe and two-term President of the United States. The memorial was scheduled for completion in 2007.

It's been pretty much downhill from there. In the intervening fifteen years, Stevens and Inouye's noble idea has become a classic Washington boondoggle, an object lesson on how not to build a memorial in that city.

The enabling legislation for the Eisenhower Memorial mandated a bipartisan commission composed of four senators, four representatives, and four citizens to be appointed by the president of the United States. I have served as an appointee for just over a year.

The legislation does not limit the members' terms, so, in theory, they serve until the memorial is finished or they resign. This is unfortunate, because, in this commission at least, new members would bring a much-needed infusion of fresh perspectives and thinking. Except for David Eisenhower, Ike's grandson who in 2011 resigned over the memorial's design (I'm his replacement), and Representative Mike Simpson of Idaho, the commissioners have zealously followed, with zero dissent, Rocco Siciliano, the man who serves as permanent chairman, and his loyal staff.

A Rodeo Drive resident who was a junior member in the Eisenhower administration, Siciliano claims he can channel Ike. In a letter written shortly before his death, Senator Inouye expressed concern that the Eisenhower Memorial Commission (EMC) was ignoring the Eisenhower family's doubts about the design. Siciliano was having none of it: "I am one person," he wrote, "who feels competent to say that he believes President Eisenhower would be most pleased as to what the present Commissioners have unanimously accepted." Shades of Shirley MacLaine!

The EMC has a staff of nine full-time employees, several making six-figure salaries, ensconced in a K Street office suite. There's also a senior advisor, a senior writer, and a crowd of consultants, including those for international affairs and communications, plus an assortment of advisory committees. Until its budget recently was cut in half by Congress, the staff was burning through $2 million of operating expenses a year.

In 2010, more than a decade after its establishment, the EMC unanimously approved and acclaimed a $140 million design by Frank Gehry, the winner of a competition supervised by the General Services Administration's Design Excellence Program. The Program called for a twenty-first century design, signaling that many architects working in a traditional vernacular need not apply.

Because the GSA first solicited portfolios from architects for the memorial, the largest and most famous firms emerged at the top of the pile. The process disadvantaged small practices with talent but without high profiles. Of the forty-four proposals, only four made it to the short list.

And, of course, the most glittering of all was Frank Gehry's, perhaps the world's most famous architect.

Only after the shortlisted firms were chosen were they asked to submit a "design vision," the most important element of the memorial. Hiring an architect before seeing his or her plan was rather like buying a pig in a poke. In fact, the design jury, composed of independent experts, said that all the designs were "mediocre" and that "none of the visions expressed the whole essence of Eisenhower." The evaluation board, which included Siciliano and the EMC staff architect, ignored the jury's sensible recommendation for another round of applications, and Gehry was awarded the commission in 2009. Critics have claimed that Siciliano stacked the deck for the architect. He has a long history and friendship with Gehry, dating back to the early 1980s when Siciliano was on the board of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art at the time it awarded Gehry one of his first important commissions.

None of the EMC commissioners were chosen for their expertise on memorials, architecture, or aesthetics; they are either politicians or campaign donors. Even so, when they approved Gehry's postmodern design, they must have realized that it was totally out of sync with the architecture of the National Mall. As Gehry has said, "There are sort of rules about architectural expression which have to fit into a certain channel. Screw that." Eloquent indeed.

Personal ties to Gehry aside, the EMC supported the design, I believe, because they feared being seen as philistines who clung to "old fashioned," traditional architecture. A master salesman, Gehry preyed on their cultural insecurity. After all, they were told that he was a much sought-after modern "starchitect," whose brilliant buildings were adored by the forward-looking elite worldwide. A vote for Gehry would establish their cultural hipness. Of course, they were not the first Gehry customers to fall for this line.

What they unanimously approved was truly dumbfounding: a four-acre site (the Washington Monument and the Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials could occupy the space with room to spare) to be populated with ten pillars, each eight-stories high (Gehry slyly calls them "columns" to link them to the Mall's classically inspired architecture). Between six of the pillars was to hang a gigantic stainless steel mesh "tapestry" (Gehry wrongly claims that tapestries are a traditional part of memorials) depicting a landscape of leafless trees allegedly portraying Kansas. Four other columns supporting smaller "tapestries" were to be placed at right angles to the major "tapestry," thus forming a semi-enclosed space. Gehry called this an urban temple or a plaza, and this concept was the very heart of his plan and sales pitch. The pillars and columns were to dwarf a small figure of Ike as a teenager and two truly pedestrian, waxwork–like bas-reliefs that depict scenes from his military and presidential careers. These are the elements of the plan's feeble core.

There are many other flaws in Gehry's design, but the most glaring is its failure to fulfill even the most basic function of a memorial. A memorial should be immediately understandable; it should elevate its subject, not diminish it; it should inspire awe and reverence, not create bewilderment; it should embody the character of its subject. Gehry's self-important plan does just the opposite.

Ike, the son of a hard-working Kansas family of modest means, was a humble, self-effacing soldier and president imbued with a sense of duty, honor, and patriotism. None of this is reflected in Gehry's pompous harum-scarum design that is really about glorifying one of history's most gargantuan architectural egos and not about memorializing Ike.

What, it is fair to ask, will rising generations of Americans, who will have no memory of Ike, glean from Gehry's plan? Will they be stirred and inspired by Ike's deeds as soldier and president or impressed by his humble character? Will they come away feeling that here was greatness, as they do when they leave the Jefferson or Lincoln Memorials? Unlikely. It's not surprising, therefore, that the EMC is spending over $2 million for a digital e-memorial, whatever that means, to explain Gehry's design to visitors because that is something it can't do for itself. Does it make sense for tourists to come

to the site only to have their eyes immediately directed back to a digital device?

The design for the Eisenhower Memorial is not the first time Gehry has tried to be an iconoclastic bad boy eager to shake up Washington. In 1999, he was commissioned to design an addition to the venerable Corcoran Gallery. This beautiful, classically inspired museum, just steps away from the White House, was to be smothered by Gehry's plan that violently, and purposely, clashed with every building around it. As in his design for the Eisenhower Memorial, he figuratively flipped the bird to the Corcoran's distinguished neighbors. (In a recent news conference an infuriated Gehry physically did just that when asked if his architecture was only about spectacle. When questioned about the future of "emblematic" buildings, the sort he designs, he replied, "Let me tell you one thing. In this world we are living in, 98 percent of everything that is built and designed today is pure shit." He implied, naturally, that his work belonged to the other 2 percent.)

The failure to raise money for Gehry's plan for the Corcoran presaged what has happened with the Eisenhower Memorial. The design can't command public support. Over $1 million have been spent on a private fundraising consultant, but fewer than $500,000 have been raised; fundraising efforts have netted a loss of approximately $700,000.

A good part of this is because an avalanche of negative criticism in publications as diverse as *The New Yorker* (which said that the Eisenhower Memorial was a bipartisan issue: everyone hates it) and *National Review*, as well as reasoned opposition from many quarters, including the Eisenhower family, has made donors wary of contributing.

Because of the lack of private funds, the taxpayers have been footing the bill. A recent congressional report (see below), finds that, to date, the EMC has spent around $44 million of the nearly $65 million initially appropriated by Congress. Gehry's firm has already collected over $16 million dollars and $13 million more have gone for administrative support and for managing the design process. Astonishingly, the EMC paid the Gehry team for 95 percent of the construction documents, even before the plan received the first federal approval, a process that usually involves many design changes over a considerable period of time.

Congressional criticism of the EMC has recently risen to a new level. In July 2014, the House Committee on Appropriations called for an "open, public, and transparent redesign process" and mandated the EMC "cease all expenditures relating to the current memorial design" until that process was in place. And a bill (H.R.5203), co-sponsored by Chairman Ken Calvert of the House Subcommittee on Appropriations for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies, and Congressman Rob Bishop of the House Committee on Natural Resources, seeks to defund the Commission and its staff.

Recently, Bishop's Committee on Natural Resources issued a well-documented report entitled "A Five-Star Folly" that eviscerates the EMC's operations and practices. It says that "[the committee] has identified significant questions that undermine the viability of the current design and the Memorial Commission's ability to see a memorial to completion."

Moreover, a waiver from the Federal Commemorative Works Act, which would have allowed construction to begin before all the money for the memorial was secured, has been removed. Because of the poor record of private support, this means millions more of federal dollars will have to be in place before the first shovel of earth can be turned—a daunting prospect. In 2014, the EMC asked Congress for $51 million and received just $1 million for operating expenses to keep the lights on. Heedless of this heavy flak and completely tone deaf to mounting criticism, the EMC, driven by its staff and chairman, steadily plods on.

In April 2014, a full decade-and-a-half after it was established, the EMC finally presented the Gehry design for approval to the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), which is supposed to ensure that proposed structures in the District conform to established guidelines. Much to the EMC's dismay, the Gehry plan was turned down for a number of reasons, but principally because some of the pillars supporting the "tapestries" blocked the view toward the Capitol.

In September, the EMC met and voted to return to the NCPC with a rejiggered Gehry design. Two senators, Jack Reed of Rhode Island (who said it was a "good time to give someone else a chance and bring in new perspectives") and Jerry Moran of Kansas, resigned within two weeks of the meeting. The revised design removed the side "tapestries," but left intact two of the pillars that had previously supported them. These forlorn, functionless objects now look like huge industrial smokestacks; one NCPC member said they resembled supports for a highway overpass; another likened the pillars to the ruins in the last scene of *Planet of the Apes*. Nonetheless, despite further harsh criticism from some NCPC commissioners, and a single brave vote against acceptance cast by Commissioner Beth White, the revised Gehry design was given preliminary approval, a stunning example of bureaucratic nearsightedness.

There are two issues at play here: the NCPC's spinelessness and Gehry's frantic zeal to get his Eisenhower Memorial built in the nation's capital. So desperate was Gehry that he sacrificed his elaborate plan for a temple or plaza, the design's raison d'être, simply to meet the narrow technical guidelines of the NCPC. So much for artistic integrity.

Moreover, by approving the Gehry design merely because it allegedly satisfied its technical guidelines, the NCPC ignored the larger issue: the clash of Gehry's Eisenhower Memorial plan with the National Mall. This bad precedent will encourage further actions of this sort where expedience trumps good architecture and good sense.

Energized, the EMC sped on to the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), an agency charged with reviewing the design and aesthetic merits of projects to be built in Washington. The Gehry design had already received preliminary approval from the CFA, but not without harsh criticism from some of the commissioners, one even claiming that Gehry's plan would fail as "a traditional first-semester architecture exercise." Distressingly, Earl A. Powell III, the long-time director of the National Gallery and Chairman of the CFA, was Gehry's cheerleader. With Powell's continuing support, the revised Gehry design sailed though the CFA at its October meeting.

Now the EMC is doing a premature victory dance as they rush to get final approvals from the NCPC and CFA. They've even declared in a recent press release that they intend to break ground in 2015, making one wonder if the EMC and its aggressive staff have lost touch with reality.

To begin construction, the EMC needs north of $80 million in additional funds, but Gehry is notorious for his massive cost overruns, so the final price tag will probably be much higher. As John Silber wrote in *Architecture of the Absurd*, "When Gehry is hired, the partnership of client and architect is virtual except when it comes to paying the bill." These overruns have to be paid by Gehry's clients, but in the case of the Eisenhower Memorial, the EMC commissioners need not open their wallets because the American taxpayers will have to foot that bill.

Given the massive public opposition to the memorial, including that of the Eisenhower family, and the lack of appropriations from Congress, it is far-fetched to believe that Gehry's plan will ever be fully funded. Yet, as long as the EMC continues to get a modicum of operating expenses and remains under Gehry's thrall, it will survive, proving President Reagan's maxim that a "government bureau is the nearest thing to eternal life." If the EMC is not stopped, it will spend down its remaining money, about $25 million, chasing Gehry's bill of goods. And, when it's spent its last cent, there will be no Eisenhower Memorial or the resolve to start again.

With sustained efforts by the public and Congress, the EMC can be stopped, and something good can be built with the money the EMC still has in the bank. Ike's son, General John Eisenhower, who knew his father a little bit better than Siciliano did, put it well when he wrote that instead of Gehry's plan, "taxpayers and donors alike will be better served with an Eisenhower Square that is a green, open space with a simple statue."

If this happens, a great American will be fittingly honored and the National Mall will escape disfigurement by Frank Gehry.

The passionate eye
by Marco Grassi

Edmund White, that perceptive chronicler of what he termed "the paradoxes of Paris," recounts that he was once invited to "one of those *mondain* dinners the French know how to give with such grace and that are made up of such startling combinations of guests that they are invariably exciting and (to use a favorite French word that always makes Americans bridle) terribly 'amusing.'" Now imagine having been there with White and having at first eavesdropped and then participated in a conversation about art between two elegant and obviously very well-informed gentlemen: one, a famous museum director, the other, a journalist and critic. They are spiritedly conversing about the artistic significance of a dizzying variety of places, periods, styles, mediums—only some of which have the ring of familiarity. And yet, despite its decidedly esoteric aura, this free-form exchange of opinions, comparisons, and insights is anything but pedantic. You are totally enchanted and, beyond feeling a tinge of envy, you're grateful for the privilege of having been included as an equal in the discourse.

But it gets better: it turns out that the two gentlemen are preparing to set out on a tour of great artistic sites and graciously suggest that you, the eavesdropper, might consider coming along! Although the encounter at the Parisian dinner party is imaginary, the invitation is very real and is now actually proffered in the form of a trim and attractively produced book called *Rendez-vous with Art*, recently published by the two gentlemen: Philippe de Montebello and Martin Gayford.[1] The former, of course, needs no introduction, especially to New Yorkers who have for decades cherished him as the *numen* protector of our city's pre-eminent cultural institution, the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The latter's name is, perhaps, more familiar in Great Britain, where his reviews, art criticism, and commentaries are widely read and quoted in the popular as well as the specialized press. Both have carried on an intimate and life-long discourse with art, and each, in his own way, has asked questions and sought answers in the course of that dialogue—a dialogue that continues as we accompany the two friends in their travels. They roam from country to country, city to city, duck in and out of museums great and small, linger in churches, stroll through palaces and, in between, enjoy sharing a congenial meal in a favorite restaurant. They dwell thoughtfully before scores of masterworks of many cultures and many periods. There is intense conversation throughout and, where necessary, a running commentary illustrating the context of their remarks.

Described in this way, the de Montebello–Gayford interchange might be compared to a sort of latter-day Socratic dialogue, conducted in a peripatetic mode (stretching within an inch of its life the Hellenic similitude). Although the museum director plays Sherlock to the critic's Watson, his intent is not to edify, instruct, or even inform in a teacher/pupil relationship. To be sure, it is de Montebello who leads Gayford's attention to this

1 *Rendez-vous with Art*, by Philippe de Montebello and Martin Gayford; Thames & Hudson, 248 pages, $35.

or that artifact; it is he who describes his reaction to it and occasionally elaborates his thoughts in response to a question or two; he occasionally, but not always, adds comments of a purely art-historical nature. More importantly, since the museum director's experience spans so many decades and varied scenarios, there is a sprinkling here and there of interesting and amusing anecdotes that add a rich personal texture to his accounts.

As we set off, eager but silent companions in this remarkable tour, we soon realize that we came along not to learn—but simply to *enjoy.* Gayford summarizes this in the very first pages: the book is meant to be "neither art history nor art criticism but an experiment in shared appreciation the actual experience of looking at art." Though a small quarto size, the volume is rich in excellent illustrations, the very first of which is a fine, informal photo of de Montebello, standing in the Metropolitan Museum's Paintings Conservation Department, holding the miraculous little *Madonna and Child* by Duccio di Buoninsegna that was formerly in the Stoclet Collection. This must surely have been the director's sweetest moment of his exceptional forty-two-year tenure at the museum; it is palpably evident, even in the photograph, in the way he holds and contemplates the tiny panel. He *feels* its magnetism and is clearly enchanted by the spell it casts—all the while mindful of the manifold art-historical considerations that justified the spectacular (and spectacularly expensive) purchase. But one suspects that, *ab initio*, de Montebello's response to this masterwork was that of "an informed art lover." It's the very reason, he says, that he entered the museum world: "because it was there that I could find works of art and be with them on a daily basis, enjoy their physicality, hold them, move them about. . . . [I]t is the contents [of the museum] that attracted me, not the container."

The fact that such a comment can seem startling and novel requires a bit of explanation: for more than five decades and still today, well into the twenty-first century, the idea that discriminating judgments can be based on instinct, taste, and the dictates of an informed observer's "eye" is considered highly suspect if not downright subversive. In American academic circles, art history has become an exercise in self-improvement via sociology, psychology, gender identity, and political history. Museums, despite their continued growth in attendance and popularity, are seen by a majority of academics as guardians of objects devoid of meaning because they have been removed from their socio-historical contexts; they are considered the mere materialistic detritus of civilization. We have moved so far away from the European, and specifically French, attitude toward artistic experience that *Rendez-vous with Art* can appear quaint, dated, or, worse still, irrelevant. On the contrary, its publication should be applauded. Though its outward appearance is modest and the book lacks the usual trappings of "serious" scholarship (footnotes, etc.), the lively dialogue and the accompanying commentary convey a vital and urgently needed reminder that art, as Berenson described it so long ago, is supremely "life-enhancing."

Edmund White, quoted earlier, is an American writer and essayist who lived in France in the 1980s and 1990s. He noted that a rapidly disappearing European, and peculiarly French, attitude towards art—and life in general—is that of the *flâneur*, described variously as a "lounger," "ambler," "man of leisure" who invariably, but never systematically, seeks aesthetic fulfillment. White, intrigued by what he perceived as a pursuit particularly ill-suited to Americans, published a now-forgotten booklet on the subject, noting that *flânerie* reached its height during the mid-nineteenth century. Baudelaire, who considered himself a devoted practitioner of the art, wrote in *The Painter of Modern Life* that a *flâneur* is a "passionate spectator," while Balzac, even more aptly, called *flânerie* "gastronomy of the eye." While the authors of *Rendez-vous with Art* might understandably take umbrage at being described as *flâneurs*—the term having, of late, acquired a somewhat unsavory connotation—there is little doubt that a measure of exclusivity, esoteric refinement, even elitism, colors the urbane musings of our two traveling companions; they are gentlemen of leisure enjoying each other's company in pursuit of what interests and pleases them aesthetically.

As if to exemplify the wide-ranging quality of their off-the-beaten-track *flânerie*, the authors' first stop is at the Metropolitan—not in front of Rembrandt's *Aristotle*, nor Breughel's *The Harvesters*, and not even at the *vitrine* where the heavenly Duccio is enshrined, but before "the yellow jasper lips" of

an Egyptian queen's shattered head. The enigma of that mouth's expression is likened to the *Mona Lisa*, as if to shock the reader into realizing that great—indeed sublime—beauty can be discovered in unexpected encounters, if one's eyes are trained to "see" rather than merely "look." This experience also serves to introduce one of the recurring, and intellectually most stimulating and controversial themes of the book: the removal of art objects out of their original temporal, physical, and cultural contexts into the entirely new existence that the modern museum imposes, or rather *super*imposes on them. Rather than deplore this migration, as do virtually all post-modern critics, de Montebello, by his very choice of opening the dialogue with this eminently "decontextualized" fragment, gives powerful support to its legitimacy as a museum display.

By contrast, the travelers' next destination—Florence—offers abundant evidence that viewing works of art in the exact same light and space in which they were originally placed immensely enriches the experience. This is surely the case with some of the masterpieces of sculpture and painting, such as the Marsuppini Tomb by Desiderio da Settignano or the Giotto frescoes of the Bardi Chapel, in the Church of Santa Croce. But what about the many other monumental Renaissance works that, due to conservation issues, have been replaced by copies—the prime example being Ghiberti's "Gates of Paradise" of the Baptistery? There are no easy answers to such questions, particularly for connoisseurs like de Montebello; he appears as troubled by this as he is about the restoration of the great Cimabue Crucifix that was partially destroyed when the terrifying flood of November 1966 tore through the Cloister of Santa Croce. In the end he seems to surrender to the expediency of a reasonable compromise: it remains, as any thoughtful conservator will tell you, the best we can hope to do with our artistic patrimony, conservation not being, alas, an exact science. By chance, de Montebello was present in Florence that fateful November, and the catastrophe must have left its mark on the future Director of the Metropolitan Museum. It also provided him with a priceless anecdote about having been invited to lunch by the late Sir Harold Acton, and showing up at the door of the magnificent Villa Capponi just as the flood waters were reaching their destructive peak. At that moment, Acton was unaware of what was happening in the city below, but what follows is a moving account of how two art lovers of different generations experienced the devastating event.

Today, that disaster and the losses it caused are only dimly recalled even by Florentines. Almost totally forgotten is the fact that, over the last two centuries, the fabled "cradle of the Renaissance" has been the victim of man-made insults far more serious than the flood of 1966. The reckless wholesale "urban renewal" carried out in the 1860s when Florence was briefly the capital of united Italy, deprived the ancient city of its entire circle of walls, some of its bridges, and most of its medieval center. This was followed by the barbaric Nazi destruction of yet more bridges and ancient buildings as the Wehrmacht retreated across the Arno in July 1944; not to mention, of course, the sieges suffered at the hands of emperors and popes from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. And so we are left with a visual palimpsest that serves as an apt parable for how imperfectly our artistic heritage survives, whether still in place or endlessly dispersed. Again and again de Montebello returns to the question of "place" or "context" debating, for instance, whether certain paintings or sculptures should not be moved back to their original settings. As one of the world's great museum directors, he seems to be torn between his instinct as connoisseur and aesthete and his professional duty as warden of collections of endlessly varying origins and histories. At one point, musing about medieval ivories, a genre he obviously loves—and loves to caress—he bemoans that, today, even conservators must don latex gloves before handling them. At the Bargello in Florence, he is much taken by "the slightly messy presentation of these ivories (some of the world's greatest) which we almost 'discover' in the case. On occasion there's something too orderly about modern museums: the object perfectly aligned, pinpoint lit, that bellows out, 'Admire me.'" You know that comes from de Montebello's heart.

We tarry in Florence for one more visit: one that stretches the timeline of perception by more than two millennia, for we are now at the Archaeological Museum before an object—the so-called "Chimera of Arezzo"—of such transcendent power that it elicits from Philippe some telling observations about what constitutes a great work

of art—of any age. The magnificent bronze, dating from Etruscan times, is unique not only as a representation of the mythical fire-breathing beast, but as an unsurpassed tour-de-force of metal casting and chasing. Its aura of historical distinction is further enhanced by the fact that, after being unearthed in the mid-sixteenth century, it was lovingly cleaned by none other than Benvenuto Cellini, with Grand Duke Cosimo de' Medici looking on. Not surprisingly, both de Montebello and Gayford know the "Chimera" intimately from many previous visits, "because one never exhausts what a great work has to give, whether it's in the detail or the whole." Museums, large and small, which grant us the privilege and pleasure of returning to a favorite object as often as the spirit moves us, must also contend with the more challenging function of mounting temporary exhibitions, unfortunately not always with laudable results.

"Blockbuster" exhibitions came in for considerable, and justified, criticism during the "Hoving years," when de Montebello's predecessor experimented with many questionable practices that have now become routine in today's museums. Most, but not all, curators and museum directors learned from those costly mistakes. De Montebello surely did, and eventually, some of the most memorable and successful of such super-shows were mounted at the Metropolitan under his watch. One should not forget—though it's not mentioned in the book—that perhaps the most astonishing of all was the exhibition of de Montebello's significant purchases, all gathered together at the end of his tenure; an array of such quality, breadth, and artistic distinction that these acquisitions, on their own merits, added an entire further dimension to the museum's holdings. And yet, while beholden to always seek out "the best" and "the greatest," he bridles at the sight of the huge banners and endless tchotchkas reproducing the image of *The Girl with a Pearl Earring* spilling out of the Mauritshuis in the Hague. "Now," he says, " I don't even want to see the actual painting; they've ruined it for me. I've seen her image ten times before and after entering the museum. It's really a travesty to do that."

De Montebello implies that there is a limit to how far any cultural institution can go before it begins to pander to its constituency and, at that point, debases the value of its currency. Where that tipping point lies can only be determined by thoughtful judgment and a sure sense of taste—qualities that the former Director of the Metropolitan fortunately possessed in abundance. To be sure, exhibitions, even of famous masterpieces if intelligently planned, can add significantly to our knowledge—not to mention our pleasure. This is particularly true when works of art of similar characteristics can be exhibited together. De Montebello cites the "once-in-a-lifetime" opportunity of seeing both versions of Leonardo's *Virgin of the Rocks* when they were briefly joined in the same hall at the National Gallery in London two years ago. *That* is the kind of event, blockbuster or not, about which any serious connoisseur or art professional can be enthusiastic.

As we accompany the two friends on their (actually, *our*) wanderings, we get an unvarnished glimpse of where their affections and prejudices lie. Normally, such insights are rare: famous figures of the art world are only candid in this way when they are secure in their preeminence; lesser lights tend to be either incapable to form an opinion or unwilling to express it publicly—often, both. At a certain point, our companions are drawn to the recently completed Musée du quai Branly in Paris. It now combines the ethnographic and "primitive" collections that were formerly divided between two other institutions. Some provocative discussion ensues as to the complex nomenclature assigned to these collections—none of which appear particularly appropriate. The issue is further muddied by the fact that France was a powerful colonial presence in the two principal areas represented in the museum, Africa and Oceania. How to deal with this sticky problem? The—presumably—politically correct solution was designed by the architect-du-jour Jean Nouvel. De Montebello minces no words in his assessment of the deconstructed, post-modern result: "I hate this place."

In London, the Wallace Collection elicits exactly the opposite response. "The whole thing is uplifting," de Montebello notes; no surprise, of course, for someone who spent decades in one of the grandest of Beaux-Arts buildings. At the Wallace, we not only discover de Montebello's taste in architecture, but how his continuing attraction for most things French has been conditioned by his deep roots in that culture. Praise is lavish not

only for the splendid *dix-huitième* furnishing but for the bountiful variety and superb quality of the paintings by Watteau, Boucher, Fragonard, Greuze, and their contemporaries. This is particularly revealing because the Ancien Régime has not, for many years now, enjoyed the favor of fashionable writers, academics, designers, and tastemakers in general. As any serious connoisseur, de Montebello is not afraid of sounding a bit *passé*.

However, during his lifetime of intimate proximity to great works of art, de Montebello's eye and affections have ranged far beyond France. "Intimate proximity" is, in this context, of fundamental importance to understanding his artistic sensibility. As he did at the Bargello and before the "Chimera of Arezzo," de Montebello repeatedly tells us how the art object speaks to him when observed at very close range and, better yet, when it can be touched and even caressed. As he rightly notes, developing such physical intimacy with objects, although essential to a deeper understanding of a work of art, is neither encouraged nor practiced in our museums—and certainly even less in our contemporary academic programs.

One waits in vain for de Montebello to mention what may have been the most unpleasant experience in his time at the Metropolitan; the loss of the "Euphronios Krater" when, about ten years ago, a series of legal and political complications as well as ethical considerations prompted the museum's trustees to surrender that treasure of classical Greek art into the hands of Italian government bureaucrats. There is a hint, in other passages of the book, that de Montebello takes a decidedly dim view of the "restitution" issue—and certainly of the way that game has been played by a number of states, including Italy: as a sort of cultural blackmail. The truth is that the defense and management of cultural patrimony in these states is all too often functionally inadequate and ideologically obsolete. In the end, one wonders how much more acute the pain might have been for de Montebello if the reclaimed object had, for instance, been Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo's sublime *A Dance in the Country*, of lesser artistic stature than the *krater*, but possibly closer to the director's heart. At one point he admits, in fact, that Greek ceramics were, for him, a long-delayed acquired taste.

By the time our tour concludes—where it began—in the Egyptian Galleries of the Metropolitan, we have learned that, besides vase painting, de Montebello doesn't much warm to works by Turner, nor those by Rembrandt, whereas Rubens and Velázquez—obviously for different reasons—reside near the very top of his list. Although all four are painters "of the loaded brush," de Montebello's admiration is selective, as it should be in a knowledgeable critic. His lavish praise for the lesser-known seventeenth-century artist Jacob Sanraedam is not surprising: the Dutchman's images are exquisitely refined and poetic, but avoid the slick and fussy finish of his contemporary and more popular *fineschilders*. This inclination of de Montebello's to turn to the unexpected and somewhat recondite corners of the broad art-world landscape he surveys, is very much of a piece with the "aristocratic" tradition of European connoisseurship in which he was reared. It is often to the "smaller" institutions he is drawn, where there are fewer crowds and more works that are not as widely known. It is also obvious from the places and objects described and admired that he does not consider the adjective "Eurocentric" pejorative the way so many of his colleagues now do. Still, some of de Montebello's most passionate and lyrical words are reserved for objects from other than our own civilization. The Assyrian bas-reliefs from Nineveh in the British Museum may seem a surprising choice but one is struck by how perceptively and lovingly de Montebello follows every line and surface of the "Dying Lioness." The work of art comes alive before our eyes, as if by magic. These may be the reflections of a self-described "amateur," but Gayford is quick to add that both he and de Montebello use that word with its specifically French connotation; in other words, they each love art, but hardly as "dilettantes"—Could one interject: as *flâneurs*? Their book, in its last page, is lovingly described as: "composed of fragments: conversations, thoughts, reactions, words and silences in front of great works of art." Is that not *flânerie* in its most sophisticated form?

Would that *Rendez-Vous with Art* were made required reading in today's postgraduate art history programs! But there is hope. Fortunately, Philippe de Montebello, among his many undertakings in an active retirement, has chosen to lecture at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts, considered the most prestigious of these programs in America.

The "new" New Brutalism
by Michael J. Lewis

Is there anything so invisible as that which was fashionable the day before yesterday? This is the blind spot through which every work of art and literature must pass before re-emerging as a distinct entity in history's rear-view mirror. Or not, as the case may be; for much popular art, the blind spot means permanent oblivion. Such I thought would be the case with Brutalism, that postwar architectural movement distinguished by its raw concrete, burly masses, and general air of insolence. Its heyday was the mid-1960s, after which point Brutalism began to fall from favor; by the time I entered a German school of architecture in 1980, it was as dead as could be—unlovely, irrelevant, a universally acknowledged historical blunder. Brutalism would be like the novels of Bulwer Lytton: popular in his day, and unreadable till the end of time.

I could not have been more wrong. The revival of scholarly interest in Brutalism that began about five years ago has just burst into public view with a spate of exhibitions, books, blogs, and a major television documentary. These include Timothy M. Rohan's *The Architecture of Paul Rudolph*, a monograph on the creator of Yale's controversial Art & Architecture Building; *Raw Concrete*, Barnabas Calder's forthcoming survey of British Brutalism; and *Concretopia: A Journey Around the Rebuilding of Postwar Britain*, by John Grindrod (itself a wonderfully Brutalist name). Among the exhibitions is "New Brutalist Image 1949–1954," on view at the Tate Britain through October 2015. Capping it all is *Bunkers, Brutalism, Bloodymindedness: Concrete Poetry*, an ambitious two-part BBC documentary written and hosted by the critic Jonathan Meades. It seems safe to say that there is no topic in architecture at present that is of greater interest and curiosity than Brutalism.

As with all historical revivals, the question to ask is *Why now?* What is it about the cultural moment that makes Brutalism resonate with us today in a way that other architectural artifacts of the 1960s (for example, the geodesic domes of Buckminster Fuller, or the cellular architecture of Moshe Safdie's Habitat) do not? For discarded styles are revived only when they can be made to speak again to the present, when they offer some quality that is lacking from the current scene. If that is the case, then the Brutalist vogue should be watched closely, for the scholarly fad is likely to be expressed soon in tangible building.

The New Brutalism—as the term was first coined—has the unlikeliest of etymologies, for it was both a Swedish joke and a Communist insult. In January 1950, the Swedish architect Hans Asplund, son of the celebrated Gunnar Asplund, saw his colleagues' drawings for an uncommonly blunt and unsentimental house in Uppsala and joked that they were *Neo-Brutalists*, a term he invented. Asplund passed on his bon mot to some English friends (including Michael Ventris—the English polymath who deciphered the Greek Linear B alphabet) and they in turn introduced it into English usage. It seems to have

first appeared in print in December 1953, when it was claimed by the young architects Peter and Alison Smithson in their publication of an unbuilt house in London: "[H]ad this been built it would have been the first exponent of the 'New Brutalism' in England." It is characteristic of the Smithsons' straightforwardness that they wrote out their intentions for the contractors who would bid on the house—"It is our intention in this building to have the structure exposed entirely, without interior finishes wherever practicable"—perhaps the only time that printed specifications have been used as a platform for architectural philosophy.

The New Brutalism, Reyner Banham's monograph of 1966, proposes a second etymology. During the immediate postwar era, official architectural policy in the Soviet Union and its satellites insisted on neo-traditionalism, as informed by regional and local usage. Just as Stalin had mandated Socialist Realism in painting, architecture was to be made lucid and accessible for the masses, something that esoteric modernism could not do. This policy remained in effect until the end of 1954, when Khrushchev abruptly committed Soviet architecture to functionalism and prefabricated construction. As it happened, there was a great deal of Communist sympathy among the young architects who worked for the London County Council, the one place they could find a job in the hardscrabble postwar years. With a deference that seems strange today, these young architects faithfully followed the Soviet line, designing housing blocks that were reassuringly domestic in scale and even sporting pitched roofs. Viewing themselves as representatives of The New Humanism, a catchphrase in those years in architectural circles, they contrasted their work with the flagrantly uncozy and undomestic forms of the Smithsons which they lampooned as The New Brutalism. And so the term that misleadingly suggests a revival of some previous Old Brutalism is nothing more than a burlesque of The New Humanism.

In each case (both etymologies seem true), the New Brutalists began life as a witticism and not as a coherent architectural program. But it did seem to encapsulate a certain brash attitude, one strikingly similar to that of those contemporary novelists and playwrights that would shortly become known as the "angry young men." And so the term might have remained, a loose generational marker without specific architectural meaning, were it not for a linguistic coincidence. The French term for rough-cast concrete is *béton brut*, a material that Le Corbusier had just used to striking effect in his Unité d'habitation at Marseille (1947–1952). That building encouraged the Smithsons and other young architects to dispense with smooth surfaces and finishes, and to use other materials such as wood and metal in their raw form, i.e., unpolished, unsanded, and unpainted. To associate their Brutalism with the *brut* of Le Corbusier was to drain the term of its flippant origins and give it an impeccable modernist pedigree.

Initially the New Brutalists did not view themselves as challenging the modern movement, as it had been formulated during the 1920s by Le Corbusier, Rietveld, Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, and others. They rather saw themselves as bringing at long last to England an international modernism that had been delayed by the Depression, world war, and by England's incorrigible provincialism. And, in comparison to the modernism of the 1920s, their early buildings do not look radical in the slightest. Were it not for the absence of elegant finishes, one might think that the Smithsons' rigorously modern Hunstanton Secondary School (1949–1954) was the work of Mies himself and not of the Smithsons.

The belated arrival in Britain of fully developed continental modernism soon exposed a paradox. That architecture had achieved its definitive form by 1932, when Philip Johnson and Henry Russell Hitchcock dubbed it the International Style in their pioneering exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. But the intervening twenty years had been perhaps the most convulsive in all human history, and the pictorial arts had been transformed radically, not only by the war itself, but by the accelerating international exchange of ideas between refugees, the new insights of psychology, and the simple fact of the atomic bomb. Painting

and sculpture had been made to confront the same enduring themes that all archaic art ponders: creation, life, violence, and death. But none of this had as yet left any appreciable mark on architecture, which continued in the same channel as it had in the twenties: laconic, Platonic, and coolly functionalist. The rise of the New Brutalism was an expression of this discrepancy in sensibilities, and the new appetite for coarse textures and raw materials—as opposed to the sleek machine finishes sought during the 1920s—was a tentative first step toward bringing architecture into harmony with the other arts. The critic Reyner Banham made this point in an important 1955 article in the *Architectural Review* published in December 1955: "In the last resort what characterizes the New Brutalism in architecture as in painting is precisely its brutality, its *je-m'en-foutisme*, its bloody-mindedness."

The original New Brutalism, then, was the product of a particular time and place, and the peculiar mood of the immediate postwar era with its privation and austerity. There was also a heightened awareness of all things American, not merely the hundreds of thousands of soldiers who passed through Britain during the war, but the overwhelming presence of the American economy afterwards, its cars and advertising, films and music. This produced a complicated mixture of envy, longing, and resentment, which in their totality averaged out as a form of chagrin, and which made itself felt across all the arts. Nowhere is this more clearly displayed than in the *Parallel of Life and Art*, the groundbreaking exhibition organized by the Independent Group in 1953. With its enlarged photographic panels that found curious correspondences between different kinds of image, the exhibition brought together the basic components of Pop Art: snappy graphic presentation, a visual clutter suggestive of glossy magazine advertisements, and an overall tone of deadpan irony. Among its curators (although they preferred to be called "editors") were Peter and Alison Smithson, along with the troubadour of New Brutalism himself, Reyner Banham.

The great irony of this, of course, is that the Smithsons were not aware that even as they believed they were working to keep orthodox modernism vital and relevant they were simultaneously helping set into motion certain tendencies that in a decade would serve to undercut the authority of modernism.

Already by 1954, the New Brutalism was a discussion topic in the United States, where it soon shed the prefix New (evidently architects grew tired of explaining that there was no Old Brutalism). Removed from the peculiar local circumstances of its creation, the style became something quite different from the modest pragmatism of the Smithsons. It did not take long before any building sporting raw concrete was labeled Brutalist, especially those that emphasized or flaunted it. In the process, the irony implicit in the original name was lost. Thus the most conspicuous of North American Brutalist buildings, such as Paul Rudolph's convoluted Art & Architecture Building at Yale (1959–1963) or Kallmann McKinnell & Wood's strangely top-heavy Boston City Hall (1962–1968), are characterized by an earnest and overwhelming monumentality, from which the slightest particle of whimsy seems to have been surgically extracted.

But this, after all, is the habitual pattern of American art. Europe brings forth a stylistic movement after an agonized gestation—years of ardent theoretical debate, intense and protracted experimentation in small cells of artists, furious opposition from the entrenched forces of the academy—only to cross the Atlantic as a fashionable and appealing set of visual forms, purged of controversy and ideology. So it was that Impressionism, for example, arrived in the 1880s as a pretty decorative mode requiring no deep commitment to principle. Or that diametrically opposed ideological camps such as Surrealism and Cubism, antagonistic in Europe to the point of violence, contended benignly when transplanted to New York. Likewise, Brutalism, which arrived in the mid-1950s as a novel and arresting visual language that reveled in precisely those qualities in which the International Style was most deficient: weightiness, bulky mass, and palpable texture.

Yale's burly, baffling Art & Architecture Building is easily the toughest of the bunch. Rudolph placed a rugged tower-like element at each of the four corners to act as an armature for his concrete floor slabs, which he slotted into position like ice-cube trays in the freezer. The result was a spatial procession of bewildering inscrutability, through thirty-seven different mezzanines, platforms, and half-levels, and, not until one arrives at the vast open hall concealed within the labyrinth of concrete, can its logic be grasped. (Rudolph was one of those rare architects who thought vertically, and whose buildings are more comprehensible in section than in plan.) Instead of the fluid continuous space of modernism, the A & A offered plunging vertical shafts and unexpected diagonal vistas. One veteran of the building in its original form confessed to me that it was difficult to concentrate on his architectural drafting when he had an oblique but enticingly direct view of a nude model in a life drawing class conducted several levels away.

Rudolph's achievement at the A & A was to recapitulate the strenuous energy of his composition in the way he detailed its walls. Usually *béton brut* derives its texture from its formwork, the traces left by the grain of the wood form into which the concrete is poured. For Rudolph this was not aggressive enough. He had his corrugated concrete panels beaten with hammers, leaving a violently scored and fractured surface, capable of rending the flesh in the same manner caused by keelhauling. Or so the historian and critic Vincent Scully suggested in a 1964 review, although he counted this as one of the building's strengths:

> The building thus repels touch; it hurts you if you try. The sense is of bitter pride, acrid acerbity rising perhaps to a kind of tragic gloom, since the light falls across the gashed ridges in long dusky veils, all brightness eaten by the broken surfaces, no reflections possible, instead sombre absorption everywhere.

It is of the greatest irony that this manifesto of acerbity and gloom should be built directly across from Louis I. Kahn's Yale Art Gallery (1951–53), a building that was hailed in its day because of its exposed concrete ceilings as the first American exemplar of the New Brutalism. Nowhere else can one stand and see so clear an illustration of the leap from the anti-heroic New Brutalism to the portentousness of high Brutalism. Yet for Scully in 1964, the portentous was exactly appropriate to the historical moment, those fraught years at the apogee of the Cold War, just after the Cuban Missile Crisis and the assassination of President Kennedy: "How raw and violent it is—that is, we are—how resourceful, determined, and uneven in strength; all this so truly, openly, with so much talent, I think bravely, stated here."

English critics like to say that Brutalism is the natural architectural expression of the welfare state. To the extent that it is colossal, pitiless, and distressingly permanent, this is true, although it might be more proper to describe it as the vernacular expression—that is, a convenient set of formulae and practices that can be applied to any architectural problem without arduous thought, much like Palladian architecture in the eighteenth century. The truth is that Brutalism never caught on with the public, who could not be made to see that the problem with modern architecture was that it was insufficiently surly. Nor did commercial or corporate clients embrace it. Only institutional clients in the academy and in government—clients inordinately susceptible to the authority of expert opinion—take Brutalism to heart. But the 1960s was their moment, and their Brutalist legacy is everywhere: in the monumental government buildings and civic plazas that followed in the wake of urban renewal, in highway building, in the new campuses across the country created by the expansion of higher education, and in the countless housing projects that are the physical manifestation of the Great Society.

The public enthusiasm for Brutalism, never keen, waned over the course of the 1960s. It flickered on with diminishing vigor for another decade or so, but as the great run of government-sponsored urban renewal projects trickled to a halt, it dropped from sight, along with the overweening confidence and swagger that marked the North American version of

Brutalism. When Rudolph's A & A Building burned on June 14, 1969, it was widely but erroneously believed that it had been set on fire by the disgruntled student architects who were forced to use it. This date can serve as a symbolic end of the Brutalist moment, the instant where its prestige collapsed.

That this once discredited style is now in the process of a comprehensive rehabilitation reminds us that all historical judgments are tentative. Already my colleagues in schools of architecture tell me that their student projects are beginning to look distinctly Brutalist, especially in their bulky massing. It is not hard to see why. For more than a generation now, architecture has aspired to a state of absolute sleekness, in which materials have no weight and surfaces no texture. The practice of designing by computer—not only preparing drawings but conceiving them on the computer screen, and gauging their visual qualities there—has accelerated the process to the point where most buildings give the impression of having been put together through a cold, analytical process, without any feeling for the physicality of materials. Perhaps this is why those few architects who revel in the tactile poetry of their materials—one thinks of Tod Williams and Billie Tsien—have been so much in demand lately.

Whether this *New* New Brutalism will amount to more than a mere nostalgic revival resurrected by a bored culture at an impasse or if it will have a beneficial effect on the architecture of our day, it is too early to tell. For all its excesses during its heyday, it has within it the seeds of a genuine architectural renewal—a feeling for the drama of weight and gravity, for the mournful dignity of large permanent forms, for the recognition that we have fingers as well as eyes, and an awareness of that ancient struggle of flawed but passionate man with his limited repertory of stubborn materials. If it capitalizes on these qualities, and acts to reinvigorate the glittering but sterile architectural landscape of the present, the second Brutalist moment will have left a more precious legacy than the first.

Drawing with scissors
by Karen Wilkin

Henri Matisse clearly reveled in moving sensuous, responsive paint across the surface of a canvas. Yet, during the last decade of his long life—born in 1869, he died in 1954—he abandoned this time-honored way of working in favor of arrangements of shapes cut with tailor's scissors out of sheets of paper painted with gouache. About three decades earlier, in the summer of 1912, Georges Braque had invented collage when he first added a plane of imitation wood-grain paper to a charcoal drawing, forever raising questions about the real and the fictive in modernist art. Pablo Picasso soon adopted his friend's technique, and, together, the two young men altered the course of Cubist painting by incorporating such detritus of the real world as newspapers, sheet music, and wallpaper into their images. Matisse had been indifferent to the allure of collage in its early days, so it's not unexpected that his approach to cutting and pasting, as a mature artist, was wholly unlike that of his Cubist colleagues. Far from appropriating fragments of actuality, his painted paper images were constructed with elements that he himself completely shaped and colored. The large-scale works he made with this method, known as the "*Gouaches Coupées*" ("Cut-Out Gouaches" or more commonly, in English, "Cut-Outs") are perfect embodiments of "late style": the uninhibited work produced by a supremely gifted, long-lived artist in his last years; the Cut-Outs are notable for a sense of daring, even recklessness, born of long experience and, perhaps, of an awareness of having nothing to lose. In some ways, the economical, brilliant, and inventive Cut-Outs sum up everything Matisse had been investigating and experimenting with since he found his individual voice at the beginning of the twentieth century; in other ways, they explore entirely new territory. The confrontational, shallow expanses and spreading compositions of the majority of the Cut-Outs suggest a new attitude toward space, one that seems to parallel and even anticipate the declarative all-overness of some of the most radical post-1940s abstraction.

This extraordinary body of work is surveyed in "Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs" at the Museum of Modern Art.[1] It's a ravishing exhibition that, despite throngs of visitors and a rather crowded installation, provokes admiration for the human capacity for invention and inspires nothing short of awe for the man who made these joyous, unprecedented works. Confronted by the forthright, gorgeously colored Cut-Outs, we admire Matisse's ability to astonish. We marvel at his boldness and his appetite for visual richness, all undiminished by age and deteriorating health. Unable to work at an easel, confined to his bed and a wheelchair by serious illness and complications following major surgery, the octogenarian Matisse devised a new way of working that allowed him to reinvent and surprise himself, not only by revisiting motifs, such as seated or standing nudes, that

1 "Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs" opened at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, on October 12, 2014 and remains on view through February 8, 2015.

he had long explored, but also by entering new territory: evocations of gardens with lush foliage, starlit nights, athletic bathers, stylized flowers, and more. "Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs" and its informative accompanying catalogue are simultaneously celebrations of the sheer pleasure afforded by these remarkable works and scholarly investigations of the history of the painter's development and use of the cut-paper method. The Cut-Outs are of such stunning visual power that they demand that viewers look hard at the always surprising arrangements of pattern, shape, and seductive color before them; at the same time the exhibition also raises provocative questions about intention and method. The catalogue answers these questions, with thoughtful essays by the exhibition's organizers and a wealth of documentary photographs and detailed technical information.

The generating event for the exhibition was the restoration of Matisse's cut-paper mural *The Swimming Pool*, originally made in 1952 for the dining room of his apartment in the Hôtel Régina in Nice. Photographs show the two-part frieze, more than fifty feet long overall, wrapping around the room, interrupted by doors, with drawings of heads pinned above and below the relaxed parade of floating female nudes. Some of these agile figures are conjured up with patches of blue paper; others are evoked by the voids created by cutting out the "positive" shapes. These expressive, stripped-down forms tumble against a broad, horizontal band of white paper, sometimes becoming interchangeable with the suggested water patterns and sometimes escaping the confines of white zone, like leaping dolphins. The band evokes the tiled walls of a swimming pool, but the frieze can also be read as bathers frolicking in a stylized, surrogate wave that breaks against the tan fabric of the dining room walls. However we read the images, the mood is one of weightlessness, sensuality, and delight. *The Swimming Pool* was acquired by MOMA in 1975 and exhibited for almost two decades with the blue elements pasted to the white band, which was attached to an expanse of tan burlap. Last seen in MOMA's great 1992 Matisse show, *The Swimming Pool* was found to have suffered from the acidity of the fabric and, to correct the problem, it was removed from view for an intense, delicate conservation campaign. (An interesting video in the current installation sums up the process.) Meticulously restored to near-pristine clarity, the frieze has been reconstructed against burlap of a shade apparently close to the original background color, with the band of bathers installed at the height at which Matisse originally placed it, on walls whose proportions echo those of the room for which the mural was designed. Even more important, the individual elements, pinned to the wall in Matisse's conception of the piece, rather than stuck down, are once again attached in this provisional way, with the new fasteners carefully positioned in the original pinholes. *The Swimming Pool* looks wonderful. The colors are clear, the individual elements crisp, and pinning subtly frees the unpredictable shapes of the swimmers, subliminally adding to the sense of unfettered movement that animates the frieze. Only one caveat. It would be nice to be able to sit in the middle of the room, as Matisse must have, at his dining room table, as if we were in the pool ourselves, surrounded by agile bathers in sunlit water; no bench is provided, probably because of the crowds.

The Swimming Pool may be the heart of the show, but the many splendid works that surround the frieze serve as far more than context. The selection includes many of the best known Cut-Outs both from Matisse's last years and from his earliest experiments with cutting and pasting, so that the installation traces the history of his engagement in paper. He first employed cut-out paper shapes, pinned or thumbtacked to background sheets of paper, as early as the 1930s, usually as preparation for works in other mediums, using the technique not as an end in itself, but rather as a private way of working out alternative possibilities. In 1931, for example, he used cut paper as he developed the eloquent pared-down figures that would inhabit the arched spaces of the mural commissioned by Albert Barnes for his house in Merion, Pennsylvania. At that time, Matisse called no attention to the practice, but

in 1937–38, he returned to working with cut paper painted with gouache when he prepared the décor for the ballet *Rouge et Noir*.

The method allowed Matisse to alter his conception by shifting the location of shapes and to alter the shapes themselves by combining and recombining smaller elements. Such testing of multiple possibilities had been part of his way of working since the beginning of the twentieth century and would be until the end of his life. Change, often radical change, was always an important part of Matisse's approach, no matter how spontaneous and direct the finished work might seem. In the 1910s and 1920s, he habitually made several versions of a given motif, exploring the implications of his first conception in subsequent iterations that were often far more extreme than the initial image. Later, he frequently had the visible traces of a day's work on a painting washed off at the end of the session, so that he could begin again freshly the next day, informed but not hampered by his previous efforts. At other times, he used photography to capture the many stages of a picture's evolution and exhibited this record along with the finished canvas. The seeming spontaneity and directness of Matisse's mature work was, in fact, hard won—the result of much weighing and rejecting of alternatives. If we look hard enough, we can see that, like the multiple versions and the photographs, the multiple pin holes in the works in "Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs" vividly tell the story of this complex journey towards apparent simplicity and inevitability.

The exhibition demands that we keep switching gears. First, we revel in the sheer exuberance and the glorious color of the works on view; we mentally retrace the suave contours of the cut-out shapes and we flirt with the inventive allusions to the natural world and the human figure those shapes suggest. It all seems effortless, assured, definitive. But when we come close to the Cut-Outs, we become aware not only of the delicate inflection of the layered paper surface, but also of the labor involved in making these airborne images. We notice unconcealed vestiges of underdrawing. Everything begins to seem contingent, in possible flux. Overlaps and layerings become overwhelmingly important. The exhibition's film clips and photos of Matisse wielding his scissors like shears or slicing the paper in smooth, continuous swoops, along with glimpses of him directing his assistants, all reinforce our awareness of considered decision-making, without entirely cancelling out the sense of unhampered improvisation. As we move through the exhibition, encountering the original cut- and pasted-paper maquettes for *Jazz* (1943–1944), with their almost imperceptible surface articulations, the radiant cut-paper studies for the stained glass windows and vestments for the Chapel of the Rosary of Vence (1949), the iconic *Blue Nudes* (1952), and the large, rhythmically patterned *décorations* of Matisse's last few years, with which the installation comes to a triumphant end—not to mention the restored *Swimming Pool*—it's impossible to see these works as anything but authoritative and exhilarating. Yet we are also aware that the essential flower shapes, the supple figures, the explosive stars, and the sinuous fronds that have become emblematic of Matisse's late achievement were not arrived at in single bursts of inspiration, but rather were distilled from repeated investigations of each motif.

We watch as Matisse's first small paper shapes, painstakingly combined into larger, clearer images designed to be executed in other materials, and sometimes at other scales, give way to more direct efforts. We witness his growing enthusiasm for the special properties of what he called, in the notes to *Jazz*, "drawing with scissors." "Cutting directly into vivid color reminds me of a sculptor's carving into stone," Matisse wrote, an idea he expanded upon in a later interview: "The contour of the figure springs from the discovery of the scissors that give it the movement of circulating life. This tool doesn't modulate, it doesn't brush on, but it incises *in*." Matisse continued to create singular images out of multiple cut-out shapes; in the *Blue Nudes*, for example, the narrow spaces between elements become descriptive drawing. He also often overlapped and juxtaposed planes painted with closely related but slightly varied hues to construct large expanses. And, in addition, he would arrange shapes cut in a single campaign in generous compositions, making

their placement and the intervals between them as crucial as their individual contours.

The exhibition is punctuated with photographs documenting Matisse's original installations of his *découpages*. We see studio walls covered with unframed, rectangular compositions of large, vegetal shapes and leafy borders, pinned edge to edge. One wall of the show approximates this by bringing together many of the works recorded in a photograph—now isolated in frames—in something like their original relationships. The result reminds us of Matisse's lifelong fascination with Islamic miniatures. The closely associated, richly patterned Cut-Outs, with their looping curves and lush color disciplined by the geometry of their supports, become modern equivalents for the way the extravagant floral and geometric patterns of tile work and textiles in Persian and Mughal paintings are contained by the flat zones of schematic architecture. Perhaps it was seeing these relatively small works combined into a single, complex scheme that provoked the wall-sized works of Matisse's very last years, although we cannot ignore the influence of his working on the stained glass windows, vestments, wall "drawings" on tile, and other accoutrements of the Chapel of the Rosary, a vast project that preoccupied him between about 1948 and 1952. Photographs from about 1952 show the walls of the Hôtel Régina apartment covered directly with large leaf shapes, agile blue nudes, and stylized fruit, interrupted occasionally by cut-paper maquettes for stained glass windows. Deeply indented foliage and floating pomegranates drift across two walls, creating a garden habitat for a large abstracted parakeet and a distant blue mermaid, with the fluid arrangement unconfined by boundaries—a kind of sublime, tropical "all-over" painting. Then we encounter the composition itself, mounted on rectangular panels and framed, domesticated and contained. In the 1950s, Matisse spoke often of the "modernity" of murals, which he suggested would supplant the easel painting; he prided himself on being in the forefront of this change. Some of the late large Cut-Outs, such as the *Blue Nudes*, with their astonishing interplay of positive and negative shapes, are the scale of easel paintings and share the autonomy of the canvas. So do the two great Cut-Out "paintings," *Memory of Oceania* (1952–53), with its dialogue between cut-out shapes and drawn lines, and the declarative *The Snail* (1953). The clarity and frontality of these works seem informed by the unabashed flatness of works such as *Large Decoration with Masks* (1953), which reads as a modern equivalent of the fabulous tilework of Islamic interiors.

"Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs" is an exhilarating, informative, heavily trafficked show, that, we might think, could be neatly contextualized not only by MOMA's legendary Matisses, but also by the inclusion of artists for whom he was a paradigmatic influence, in the permanent collection galleries. Yet of MOMA's many works by abstract painters and sculptors who learned from him to make color primary as both a structural element and carrier of emotion, only Helen Frankenthaler is represented—by a 1950s picture, hung with the Abstract Expressionists; her *Chairman of the Board* (1971), whose fragile lines and staccato color shapes comment on Matisse's *Memory of Oceania*, is absent. So are all works by such inventive admirers of Matisse as Hans Hofmann, Milton Avery, Kenneth Noland, Morris Louis, Jules Olitski, Ellsworth Kelly, and Anthony Caro. A couple of Stuart Davises are on view but not his radiant *Visa* (1951), which responds directly to the plate *Les Codomas*, in *Jazz*. I suppose we should be grateful that a good selection of the permanent collection's paintings and sculptures by Matisse is up.

The cost of culture
by Daniel Grant

The 9/11 Memorial & Museum in lower Manhattan is not for the faint of heart, with its oral histories of loss told by family members of those who died, photographs and videos of the catastrophe as it was taking place, and the displays of wreckage and found personal effects. Anyone with an interest in how the United States has changed since September 11, 2001 would want to start an investigation here. Making that less possible, however, is the $24 adult admission fee. Visiting the museum is free for 9/11 family members but, for the rest of us, the cost of entry is a sizable financial investment (for a family of four, two parents would pay $48 while their children ages seven to seventeen would be charged $15 apiece, or $78 in all), which may well deter some from going to this newly opened institution. Why create such a site, only to make the cost of visiting so prohibitive? For all museums, it is impossible to know who might have gone to the museum but did not (and why they didn't), because surveys conducted at these institutions can only include the people who showed up. Still, the question roiling the museum world today remains: Does charging high admissions bring in more money to these institutions than is lost by those people who are deterred by the high cost of getting through the doors?

Going to a museum these days can be quite expensive, made more so by the recent recession that has led cultural institutions all over the country to raise prices to make up for endowment losses. For instance, adults pay $25 at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and $27 at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, and it is no less costly to visit the Museum of Modern Art in New York ($25), the Guggenheim ($22), the Whitney ($20), the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia ($22), the Art Institute of Chicago ($23), the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art ($18), or the Los Angeles County Museum of Art ($15). And, it isn't just art museums that are expensive. The Field Museum in Chicago costs $18 for an adult and $13 for children (ages three to eleven), while New York's American Museum of Natural History charges $22 for adults, $12.50 for children ages two to twelve.

David R. Jones, the president and chief executive officer for the Community Service Society of New York, called the high admission fees "cultural apartheid," noting that the "cost of culture . . . has effectively priced out a large segment of the city's population." Bruce J. Altshuler, the director of New York University's Program in Museum Studies, concurred, stating that the Museum of Modern Art's "attitude towards increasing attendance by people in the lower and even middle economic strata is implicit in its policy. The museum is saying, in effect, 'We're already at capacity. We don't need a lot more people.'"

Leading in the other direction are the Dallas Museum of Art and the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, both of which eliminated their admissions this year. Jack Becker, the director and chief executive officer of the Joslyn, claimed that the goal "is accessibility; to never deny the opportunity to view original works of art in our collection to anyone because of an inability to pay." The Joslyn had been free to the public for

decades since its founding in 1931 but added an admissions charge of $8 for adults in the 1990s, annually adding up to roughly $200,000, or between 2 and 4 percent of the museum's total revenues. They maintained one admission-free time in the course of the week, from 10:00 a.m. to noon on Saturdays, and more than 40 percent of all the museum's weekly visitors showed up then. That revealed the public's desire for admission to the institution to be free, as it had been in the past, and the director and board of the museum got rid of the $8 charge.

Proclaiming that his institution's action is intended to serve as a model for other museums around the country, Maxwell Anderson, director of the Dallas Museum of Art, similarly stated that "We're a public institution supported by the taxpayers of Dallas, and many of those taxpayers don't have the disposable income to toss around for cultural endeavors. They've got to pay the bills, keep the kids clothed. They have serious issues. And I don't want an admission fee to be an obstacle to them."

Losing that 2 percent in revenues hasn't harmed the Joslyn museum's finances, since there has been an increase in visitors—"I've seen a lot of people who haven't been through the doors here in 20 years, if ever, because they couldn't afford to come," Becker said—who are eating at the museum's café and making purchases at its gift shop. "The earned income more than offsets the loss in admissions."

Some other museums are not backing down. "Admission revenue is a critical part of the multi-layered funding mix that supports the museum and its operations," said Harold Holzer, the chief spokesman for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, adding that admissions fee produce "some $38.2 million annually," approximately 15 percent of the institution's revenues and an increase for fiscal 2013 of $400,000 over the preceding year. The Met's suggested admissions fee of $25 for adults hasn't dampened enthusiasm, as the annual number of visitors has reached record levels, topping 6.2 million people. At the Art Institute of Chicago, which raised its admission this year to $23 for adults, "we have found that those increases had no negative effect on attendance at the museum. Our attendance actually increased by 7 percent in the year that we raised our price," said a spokeswoman for the museum, adding that admissions accounts for 13 percent of the institution's revenues.

Back in 1992, the Washington, D.C.-based American Alliance of Museums reported that only 36 percent of all art museums in the United States charged any admissions. A similar study conducted in 2008 reported that only one-third of all museums were free to the public, with the average admissions fee being $10 for adults. On a national basis, including all type of museums, zoos, and historic houses, admissions account for between 2 and 4 percent of overall revenues, although some, like the Museum of Modern Art (9.4 percent), Art Institute of Chicago (13 percent), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (14 percent), and New Britain Museum of American Art (16 percent), are notably higher.

The Hammer Museum, on the campus of the University of California at Los Angeles, used to earn between 3 and 4 percent of its revenues through charging a $10 adult admissions (the university provides just over 7 percent of the museum's operating budget), although there were lots of exceptions: Thursdays were free; members of the military, UCLA employees and students with a valid ID (from any school) were free. As of the beginning of 2014, admissions fees were eliminated completely, made more palatable by two donations from longtime Hammer Museum benefactors Erika J. Glazer and Brenda R. Potter intended to make up the shortfall. On the positive side, according to a spokeswoman for the museum, attendance has risen 20 percent over the previous year.

The willingness of visitors to keep coming even with admissions fees rising may be attributable to what economists calls the "elasticity of demand"—the degree to which price effects the volume of demand. The large numbers of people who want to go to some of the most expensive museums make these institutions less willing to lower or eliminate admissions fees. Certain products are more sensitive to the budget restraints of consumers, but not so much museum admissions, which even at $20-plus per person may seem "low because museums are still very cheap entertainment and they are special occasions,"

said Gerald Friedman, economics professor at the University of Massachusetts. "You won't shun the Uffizi to save a few dollars after taking the trouble and expense to get to Florence, Italy." Or New York City or Boston or Chicago . . .

Holzer noted that out-of-state and international visitors to the Metropolitan annually account for 50–55 percent of the total. Those people also are spending a considerable amount of money on transportation, hotels, and dining, making even the museum's top suggested fee of $25 seem modest in comparison, according to the Wells Fargo Bank chief economist John Silvia. "Because of the wealth and foreign visitors in New York City, there is very little price elasticity," he said. "They can probably charge much more and not lose a customer." University of Chicago economics professor David Galenson remarked, "People who go to the Art Institute of Chicago are from the 1 percent," and admissions fees are based on what this group can afford. He added that it is a "self-selecting group of people" who go to institutions like the Art Institute and, in general, "poor people don't want to go to museums to be around affluent people."

Many museums find themselves having to choose between public policy considerations, which would promote access and thereby lowering or eliminating admissions, and economic priorities, which would compel institutions to maximize revenues from all available sources, such as admissions. Public policy and economic priorities generally are antagonistic, pushing in opposite directions. Museums try to find a balance between the two, usually through what is called "variable pricing." For instance, the Art Institute has a range of discounted admissions that aim to expand the opportunity for less well-heeled visitors, such as adults who are Illinois residents ($20) or who live in Chicago ($18), seniors and students ($17), students who are residents of Illinois ($14) and students who are residents of Chicago ($12), and children under 14 (free). In addition, there is free admission for all Illinois residents on Thursdays from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Around the country, many museums offer free admissions on certain days and hours. Mondays are free days at both the Milwaukee Public Museum (for Milwaukee County residents) and the Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, Florida, while the Portland Art Museum in Oregon is free between 5:00 and 8:00 p.m. on the fourth Friday of every month; the first Sunday of every month is free admission at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco. New York's Museum of Modern Art is free on Fridays between 4:00 and 8:00 p.m. and both the Whitney and Guggenheim museums offer a few hours a week in which visitors may pay what they wish (between the hours of 5:45 and 7:45 p.m. on Saturdays at the Guggenheim, between 6:00 and 9:00 p.m. on Fridays at the Whitney). Mark your calendars.

The existence of this hodge-podge of free days and hours is an acknowledgment that high admissions fees keep people—the very people museum education departments and outreach programs try to bring in—away. Part of what makes museums nonprofit and awarded tax-exempt status is that they provide a cultural public service, and one might wish that state attorney generals around the country, whose offices grant tax exemption to nonprofit organizations in their states, would require that the barrier to access be lowered.

But how much lower, exactly? In addition to public policy and economic considerations, some museums are now having to contend with politians adjusting their admissions policies to fit their agendas. New York Mayor Bill de Blasio passed a law earlier this year that would allow any resident of the five boroughs to obtain a municipal ID card at no cost and with no interrogation on immigration status, in order to alleviate the burdens of those who are currently "unable to visit their child's school or sign a lease," because they lack a valid form of identification. To sweeten the pot—since the idea of an ID card for which you would not be asked about your immigration status was not sweet enough—de Blasio arranged to grant all card holders free one-year access and gift shop discounts to thirty-three museums and cultural institutions (including the Met, the Museum of the City of New York, the Brooklyn Museum, the New York Hall of Science) in the city, reportedly equivalent to $2,100 worth of admissions costs per person. With the city holding the change purse for many institutions, it is no surprise that this

initial list of freebies is already so long. The next question in the debate over admissions pricing should be: Should politicians be able to use cultural access as a political rod?

The debate over what or whether to charge an admission isn't limited to the United States. In 2001, government-funded museums in London (including the British Museum, National Gallery of Art, the Tate, and the Victoria & Albert Museum) stopped charging admissions, resulting in a drop in revenues of £354 million but a 42 percent increase in attendance. Think of the loss in revenues not as bad economic policy but as an investment in education, the sort of investment that governments make all the time when they create public schools.

This type of thinking has spread. The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, which is in the process of building expansion, raised a $10 million endowment specifically to support free admission for visitors eighteen years of age and younger, to begin in 2016. Previously, free admission was only available for those twelve and under.

At the Norton Museum of Art in West Palm Beach, Florida, which had instituted free admission Thursdays for all Florida residents five years ago, "we've had more visitors coming on Thursdays than the other six days of the week combined," said the museum's chief financial officer Lucy Bukowski. After that, it added free Saturdays to all Palm Beach County residents. "Free days bring in more people." She added that museum's "basic mission is to be a resource for the community, so getting people through the door is vital." Even with the loss of admissions revenues for those two days, the overall gate has remained in the realm of $400,000–500,000, representing between 5 and 6 percent of the total museum revenues.

Going even further in this direction is the Baltimore Museum of Art, which used to offer free Thursdays but decided in 2006 to eliminate general admissions completely, resulting in an annual loss of $240,000. "However, that was only 2 percent of our budget, and it seemed worthwhile to forego that 2 percent in order to attract the people who were put off from coming in because of the price of admissions," said the museum's director Doreen Bolger. "We're a community-based museum in a city of 650,000, and 53 percent of the population is African-American." She added that, since 2006, "the audience is more diverse." Just as important, Bolger claimed that eliminating admissions helped to change the perception of the museum among city residents.

Doing away with admissions did lead to a drop-off in memberships of 10 percent—since many regular visitors become members principally to avoid ticket lines—but area businesses and wealthy donors "stepped forward to create a free admission endowment," which has helped to make up the difference.

Just as at the Hammer Museum, the Dallas Museum of Art's free admissions policy was also abetted by a donation, in its case, a three-year $9 million anonymous gift. Similarly, the Omaha-based Sherwood Foundation provided a grant to the Joslyn in order to cover the revenues lost through eliminating admissions.

"Admission to the Met is de facto free for all," wrote Judge Shirley Werner Kornreich in the fall of 2013, dismissing two class-action lawsuits against the Metropolitan Museum of Art that claimed its long-time suggested admissions fee violated its lease with the City of New York, which is the owner of the museum building. (After the ruling, then-New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg changed the city's lease with the museum in order to permit the suggested admissions.) "For those without means, or those who do not wish to express their gratitude financially, a de minimis contribution of a penny is accepted." The 9/11 Memorial & Museum is a private museum, without the $2.7 billion endowment of the Metropolitan or the $870 million endowment of the Museum of Modern Art. It has no endowment, and, therefore, has to earn its way every day. Still, limiting access only to those who can pay Museum of Modern Art admissions rates works against the institution's mission, which is to tell an important moment in the story of our nation to the greatest number of people. That sense of mission, which we see at certain museums in Dallas, Baltimore, and a growing number of other institutions around the country, should not be lost in the mad hunt for revenues.

David's slingshot
by Victoria Coates

David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands."
—I Samuel 17:45–47

The Valley of Elah is today an agricultural zone southwest of Jerusalem, not far from the small town of Zekharia. Three thousand years ago, however, it was the setting for an iconic battle between a young shepherd and a giant.

The mighty Philistines had been trying to subdue the Israelites for years when the two armies faced off across the valley. Hoping to destroy their enemies once and for all, the Philistines proposed the Israelites send one champion out against their most formidable warrior, Goliath, to resolve the war through single combat. For the Israelites, the odds seemed hopeless. Goliath was a colossus of a man, and the Philistines' skilled metalworkers had equipped him with bronze armor and weapons that far outstripped anything the Israelites possessed. He taunted the Israelites for forty days, and no one volunteered to take him on.

Then David stepped forward. A teenager who had been tending sheep while the Israelite warriors confronted the Philistines in the Valley of Elah, he had come to the camp with food for his older brothers in the army—none of whom had been brave enough to challenge Goliath. To their shame, David announced he would fight the giant himself.

David had no armor of his own, and he felt awkward and uncomfortable in what the Israelite leader, Saul, offered him for the battle. He decided to face Goliath armed only with the slingshot he used to defend his sheep from wild beasts, confident that his skill and his pure faith in God would preserve him.

Those of lesser faith despaired. Their best hope was that it would be over quickly, at which point the Israelites would become slaves to the Philistines. But then a miracle happened. As Goliath approached his prey, the young man steadied himself, aimed his slingshot, and stunned the giant with a single stone to the forehead. The enormous warrior tumbled to the ground. David took Goliath's sword and cut off his head. The Israelites were victorious.

David went on to become a great king and to found a royal house that would eventually produce Jesus Christ. But his youthful contest with the giant has long stood as a parable for the remarkable power of combining faith in the divine with human ingenuity. David's sling was more than a primitive weapon; it was the crucial advantage that enabled the shepherd to win the day.

This piece is adapted from *David's Sling: A History of Democracy in Ten Works of Art*, by Victoria Coates, to be published by Encounter Books in April 2015.

Throughout history, various kinds of metaphorical slings have enabled individuals and societies to rise like David above seemingly insurmountable difficulties and reach impressive heights of achievement. One of the more consequential of these was devised on a rocky outcropping on the Greek Peloponnesus some five hundred years after the famous confrontation between David and Goliath—albeit by a group of men who had little interest in either of them. What the Athenians invented on their citadel was a new political system of free, self-governing people. They called it *demokratia*.

Although hints of self-determination had appeared in some of the ancient Mesopotamian city-states that pre-dated Greek civilization, the fact remains that until the end of the sixth century B.C. in Athens, there was no comparable, deliberate, and institutionalized attempt to implement a democratic government. The Athenians were fully conscious of their achievement, and credited their freedom with empowering their small *polis* to lead the Greek allies to victory over the awesome Persian Empire over the course of two invasions in 492–90 and 480–79 B.C.

This political innovation coincided with the brilliant flowering of creativity (later known as the Golden Age of Greece) that set a standard of cultural excellence that endures to this day. During this period, Athens's greatest statesman, Pericles, not only served as the producer for Aeschylus's magisterial tragedy *The Persians*, but also commissioned grand monuments for the Acropolis to commemorate his city's democracy; chief among them is the exquisite temple to Athena known as the Parthenon. While its basic form was drawn from the traditional Greek temple type, its grand scale, harmonious proportions, and extraordinary decoration in the new artistic style that we call "classical" were bodily innovative and widely acclaimed as exceptional. In each coordinated detail, the Parthenon and its extensive sculptural cycle by the master Phidias tell the story of the superiority of the Athenian people, blessed as they were by the combination of freedom and genius. Pericles clearly understood the Athenians' political and aesthetic excellence to be integral facets of their national character, declaring in his Funeral Oration recorded by Thucydides:

> Our constitution does not copy the laws of neighboring states; we are rather a pattern to others than imitators ourselves. Its administration favors the many instead of the few; this is why it is called a democracy . . . We cultivate refinement without extravagance and knowledge without effeminacy; wealth we employ more for use than for show . . . In short, I say that as a city we are the school of Hellas, while I doubt if the world can produce a man who, where he has only himself to depend upon, is equal to so many emergencies, and graced by so happy a versatility, as the Athenian.

Even in its ruinous modern state, the Parthenon stands as the paradigmatic embodiment of democracy in the West.

Over the next two-and-a-half millennia in the West, the ideal of democratic self-governance has taken on a variety of practical manifestations, from small city-republics to constitutional monarchies. These free societies have set a remarkable pattern of accomplishment and influence far beyond what might be expected from their relative resources and size (at least at point of origin). And beginning with Athens, among their achievements is a series of artworks that not only have acquired canonical status in cultural history but also stand as testaments to democracy.

This is not to say, of course, that no other form of government can inspire great art; a stroll through the Pantheon built for the Roman emperor Hadrian or a glance at *Las Meninas* painted by Velázquez for the Spanish king Philip IV takes care of any such notion. Indeed, the vast majority of Western cultural patrimony was commissioned by empire or church. This circumstance makes it all the more noteworthy, however, that democracies have demonstrated a special capacity to produce extraordinary self-referential works of art—and it then follows that the study of this synergy between liberty and creativity can bring a fresh perspective to the trajectories of both human endeavors.

Ten canonical works of art and architecture representing democratic societies from ancient Athens to twentieth-century Spain stand out

as the key illustrations of this hybrid of art and political history. All of them have in some way transcended their original context to acquire a universal meaning or timeless aesthetic value. But at heart they remain tributes to the free political systems that fostered them, and which they were originally designed to honor.

Michelangelo's *David*, for example, has come down to us as the quintessential image of male beauty and is widely acclaimed as the greatest statue ever made by the greatest sculptor who ever lived. The statue has become so intertwined with the legend of Michelangelo that it is generally understood as an autobiographical statement by the artist. A great deal of scholarly attention has therefore been lavished on the figure's oversized right hand, which is read as a sort of signature for the human hand that carved the great block of marble. And so it is, but that is only one piece of a larger puzzle. There is another hand: the left hand that holds the sling without which David would have met his match. For Michelangelo and his contemporaries, David's success against Goliath was analogous to the startling achievements of the Florentine Republic.

In just a few hundred years, the city had transformed itself from a lackluster early medieval market town into the first great financial hub of Europe—a trajectory that fueled the cultural phenomenon we call the Renaissance. The term "renaissance" implies a re-birth, in this case that of the culture of classical antiquity that was considered lost during the Middle Ages. While this title is not entirely accurate, as the classical tradition had never really died, there was a palpable sense that a new era had dawned and that Florence was its epicenter.

The city the young Michelangelo encountered when he arrived in the 1480s was a hive of economic, political, and cultural activity. Florence had successfully resisted aggression from far larger and more powerful imperial rivals earlier in the century, notably the Duchy of Milan, and the city claimed a special kinship with the Biblical shepherd and his contest with Goliath. Florence had already been ornamented with statues of David by sculptors such as Donatello and Verrocchio, which Michelangelo studied closely (though his father had wanted to make a bureaucrat out of him, he was much more interested in the fine arts). He was particularly fascinated by an enormous block of marble, the largest quarried since antiquity, which had been abandoned in the cathedral work yard as too difficult to carve. Some referred to it as a cadaver, and recommended that it be broken up into more manageable pieces. But Michelangelo saw the possibility it held. He knew it wasn't dead.

Two decades later, Michelangelo got his chance to carve the great block. His early training had been in the orbit of the powerful Medici family, who professed their devotion to the Republic, but it wasn't lost on anyone that they were amassing a disproportionate amount of financial and political control over the city. The Medici were exiled by a restive population in 1494, and Michelangelo pursued new opportunities in Bologna and Rome. He remained intensely interested in Florence, however, and, shortly after a new constitution was established in 1504, he beat Leonardo da Vinci out of the competition to execute a colossal marble figure personifying the reconstituted Republic.

The resulting *David* was immediately acclaimed as a masterpiece of the highest order, and placed outside the Florentine town hall to guard against potential despots. Michelangelo understood the statue as an expression of the civic nature of the small city that had overcome huge odds, inscribing a drawing for it "As David did with his sling, so I do with my drill." The statue was so compelling that some twenty years later, when the Medici returned to dismantle the Republic once and for all and establish themselves as the Dukes of Florence on the way to becoming the Grand Dukes of Tuscany, they embraced *David* and made it into one of their personal emblems. So while most today understand the statue in the Medici context, it was originally and deliberately created to celebrate the Republic that was their deadliest enemy.

The Parthenon and *David* are examples from a larger series of works of art and architecture inspired by democracy. There is the bronze portrait of Brutus that legendarily portrays the founding hero of the Roman Republic's stern features. St. Mark's Basilica in Venice is a splendid jewel adorning a city-republic that built its own solid ground and grew fabulously wealthy through maritime trade. Rembrandt's *Night Watch* honors the citizen militias that proudly defended the liberty of

the Dutch Republic, which, like Venice, reclaimed land from the sea and prospered far beyond its size. In *The Death of Marat*, Jacques-Louis David memorialized the tragic sacrifice of the revolutionary "Friend of the People" in the turmoil surrounding the first effort to establish a French republic. By salvaging the marble sculptures from the decaying Parthenon and putting them on permanent display in London, Thomas Bruce, Seventh Earl of Elgin converted the work of Phidias into a proclamation that the British constitutional monarchy was the worthy modern heir of democratic Athens. Albert Bierstadt's *Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* conveys the huge potential of a young democracy in the untamed spaces of the New World, even while a brutal civil war threw the whole American project into doubt. Claude Monet offered his *Nymphéas* ("Water Lilies") to the French Third Republic to commemorate the hard-won victory of his friend, Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, over imperial German aggression. Finally, Picasso's harrowing *Guernica* is a stark reminder of the existential threats to democracy, such as Fascism, that gathered in the twentieth century.

Each object is part of its own nationalistic narrative and gives us a snapshot of a particular point in the trajectory of the state. All of them provide tangible pieces of historical evidence that are in some ways more reliable than texts (although texts abound in this line of study) and offer powerful insight into successive efforts to establish and sustain a democracy. They are not isolated aesthetic objects; part of their value as historical evidence derives from their active roles in the public life of the communities that produced them.

While these works of art represent vastly different historical circumstances, there are common themes that emerge from their stories: the moral power of a free citizenry, the responsibility of citizens to defend their liberty, the role of the statesman in commissioning commemorative works of art, the benefits of economic competition, and the increasing significance of the independent artist in commemorating the polity's achievements. Moreover, there are connections between the works of art and their creators, just as there are links and echoes from one democracy to another. For example, the Roman republican tradition of portraiture exemplified by the *Brutus* inspired Rembrandt, and was overtly imitated by some of the American founders. Jacques-Louis David felt a personal connection with Michelangelo because he shared the misfortune of facial disfigurement with the sculptor and a name with the sculptor's most famous work. Great statesmen from Pericles to Clemenceau understood the importance of fostering human creativity, even in moments of national crisis. Together, the stories of these works form a narrative tracing the aspirations and accomplishments of—as well as the challenges to—free peoples in the West.

As a number of these examples—notably Michelangelo's *David*—demonstrate, nothing in this history was inevitable. A resolutely undemocratic actor who had an acute understanding of the power of art, Napoleon Bonaparte, was closely connected with a number of the objects on this list, from the Roman *Brutus* to St. Mark's to David's *Death of Marat*, as he tried to manipulate them, or the artist who created them, for his own purposes. Democracy is not preordained. It is neither guaranteed to survive, nor is it a perfect form of government. Indeed, free systems have their own particular vulnerabilities, such as the lack of an efficient executive. This does not mean, however, that freedom is not worth the constant struggle to achieve and maintain. Winston Churchill famously remarked that "democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time," in an ironic reminder that despite all its drawbacks, the alternatives to this least worst kind of political system are not appealing. And the stories of these great works of art demonstrate the extraordinary human potential that can be unleashed by democracy at its best.

The phenomenon of David's Sling is, fortunately, not a thing of the past. Fortuitously, but perhaps not entirely coincidentally, the next generation of Israeli missile defense, scheduled to be implemented in 2015, is also called "David's Sling." While there are significant and obvious differences between such a program and the aesthetic objects under discussion here, the fundamental idea that liberty inspires human ingenuity is the same—reminding us of what is at stake as we safeguard as well as celebrate freedom in our own time.

How Brooklyn missed Brooklyn

by James Panero

"The persons now in this room have it in their power to decide whether in the future intellectual progress of this nation, Brooklyn is to lead or to follow far in the rear."
—George Brown Goode, "The Museum of the Future" (1889)

On the afternoon of Saturday, November 1, a small U-Haul truck pulled up to the loading dock of the Brooklyn Museum. Behind the delivery was Jason Andrew, the director and curator of Norte Maar, a Bushwick-based nonprofit at the crux of Brooklyn's artistic renaissance. The Brooklyn Museum's education department had invited Norte Maar to produce a "performance by sound artists and dancers" for its free "Target First Saturday." The show, "The Brooklyn Performance Combine," was a two-hour event Andrew and the choreographer Julia K. Gleich had planned to take place in the museum's Beaux-Arts Court that evening. Hidden among the cargo that Andrew was expected to deliver in the truck—sound equipment, costumes, and props—were unsolicited canvases and sculptures by Brooklyn artists he planned to sneak into his performance.

The museum brought in the "Combine" to promote "Crossing Brooklyn: Art from Bushwick, Bed-Stuy, and Beyond," its self-described "major survey" of thirty-five borough artists currently on view. Yet for many observers, this exhibition, which opened in October, continues through January, and had been touted as "reflecting the rich creative diversity of Brooklyn," turned out to be anything but.

"An exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum billed as a 'major survey' of Brooklyn-based artists should be exciting and revelatory," wrote Ken Johnson in *The New York Times*. "Disappointingly, it's not." Led by extensive wall labels, "Crossing Brooklyn" looked almost exclusively to artists working in what's known as "relational aesthetics," the art of context over content, some whimsically, others with heavy social agendas. One artist focused "on the need for nutritious food in economically disadvantaged urban neighborhoods." Another explored "the culture of mass consumption, overproduction, and waste" along with "the exploitation of workers and natural resources."

"Evidently counted out from the start," Johnson observed, "were artists who toil in studios making paintings, sculptures and other sorts of objects intended just to be looked at." In other words: many of the accomplishments you now see in the borough's open studios and gallery shows had been excluded from the museum. By zeroing in on a small subset of artistic production (mainly created by artists with tenuous connections to Brooklyn at best), "Crossing Brooklyn" accomplished just the opposite of displaying the borough's "rich creative diversity." Johnson's conclusion reflected the feelings of many: "Brooklyn artists deserve better than this too-small, ideologically blinkered exhibition."

For "Crossing Brooklyn," the museum claimed the curators Eugenie Tsai and

Rujeko Hockley "drew upon their extensive knowledge of the borough, as well as a wide-ranging network of unofficial advisors composed of artists, colleagues, and other creative professionals." Yet Andrew, who has curated a decade of local exhibitions and programs through Norte Maar, says that no one from the museum came to observe what he does, despite talking to Tsai. "I don't think those curators have enough pride in what is happening in Brooklyn. That is reflected in their curation. They can't keep up with the pace, the spontaneity. But in order to keep the historical relevance, you have to keep up with the art."

Andrew's account of the Brooklyn Museum's indifference to the studios and galleries of contemporary Brooklyn gets repeated across the borough's artistic communities. "It's Brooklyn's time, now," the painter, videographer, and art historian Loren Munk told me, but "the Brooklyn Museum is so wedded to their petrified state, they are going to miss it. The community has busted their buns for years. Slowly through the work of thousands of people, people started coming out here. Yet the curators are not familiar with the art community. A lot of their direction comes from academia, so they don't do the hard-ass work, do the legwork, talk to a lot of people, go to a lot of places. These people don't have the inclination."

"There should be studio buzz," Munk told me of the lead-up to "Crossing Brooklyn." Instead, there was "nothing. None of that. There was zero outreach. We were frustrated. The disengagement. The elitist approach." A Red Hook-based artist since the 1980s, Munk believes the Brooklyn Museum has been failing its own creative community for years, and in fact "the museum has gotten worse. A lot of significant people have been ignored by the Brooklyn Museum for decades. People having international influence, and the Brooklyn Museum has blown them off." The Brooklyn Museum could be at the center of the borough's creative renaissance, Munk concluded, "but it would take work. They need to reach out to the community."

As the "Brooklyn Performance Combine" took shape in the weeks leading up to its November evening, many of its local artists saw the performance as an opportunity to demonstrate the burgeoning energy of Brooklyn that the museum had long ignored. Although the "Combine," which was let in through the side door by the education department rather than by the curators of "Crossing Brooklyn," was billed as a live performance, with art works and art making officially excluded, Andrew stretched the invitation into a "mashup of Brooklyn-based poets, painters, and performers." Mixed in with his performance equipment, that afternoon he brought the canvases and sculptures of artists that he saw as indicative of Brooklyn's artistic energy but which had been ignored by the museum: Amy Feldman, Ryan Michael Ford, Rico Gatson, Tamara Gonzales, Susanna Heller, Brooke Moyse, Jessica Weiss, Rachel Beach, Ben Godward, and Jim Osman.

For two hours that evening, in an electrifying synergy that was part celebration, part exorcism, all of these canvases and sculptures became the props for the musicians, dancers, and poets of the "Combine." Carried out and positioned in the middle of the Beaux-Arts Court, the angular sculpture of Rachel Beach resonated with the vectored choreography of the Gleich dancers and the Brooklyn Ballet Youth Ensemble. The artist Jeff Feld and the cellist Mariel Roberts reflected the performance traditions of Robert Rauschenberg and John Cage. Ben Godward built up a towering abstract sculpture of plastic cups and poured materials, which he then sawed up and distributed to the audience. Sarah Schmerler, with deadpan delivery, read the descriptions and sponsor names of the museum's own stilted exhibition program, contrasting it with the energy of the room and formative personalities such as Deborah Brown and Richard Timperio who were left out of "Crossing Brooklyn." Before the event, Loren Munk had put out a call to Brooklyn artists who felt "somehow excluded from 'Crossing Brooklyn.' " During the performance, he watched as his work incorporating nearly one hundred names

on a painted map of the borough, covered with an X, was unveiled. Titled *Re-Crossing Brooklyn*, "this is a small reminder to the Brooklyn Museum that they are in the center of one of the greatest art enclaves in the world," he promised his respondents. "They should open their eyes and engage with this unique community." During the unveiling, the artist William Powhida joined the stage and delivered a monologue on the painting: "I happen to be on Loren's list of artists not included in the exhibition. I never had a studio visit. And a lot of the artists on that list never had studio visits. . . . This list is long. Take a look at it and study it." To which an audience member shouted: *Thank you!* Even if the Brooklyn Museum chose not to feature significant elements of the arts in "Crossing Brooklyn," Andrew and his performers would not let them go unnoticed. "It is a borough of immense creativity," Andrew explained to me, "and the Brooklyn Museum has missed the boat."

For an institution that has long prided itself as a community center and public accommodation rather than an elitist repository of art, such accusations would seem to cut against the promises of the museum's progressive leadership. Yet the criticism in fact speaks to the Brooklyn Museum's deep-seated misapprehension around its own history and what a great museum of art should be.

It wasn't always so. The Brooklyn Museum was born in 1823, in an era of rising civic confidence in what would become America's third largest city. The acquisitions of American paintings by the Brooklyn Institute, the museum's forerunner, reflected this outlook. Francis Guy's *Winter Scene in Brooklyn* (*ca*. 1819–20) entered the institution's collection in 1846 as an immensely popular view of Brooklyn's bustling and diverse mercantile port, a reflection of the city's transformation from old Dutch farmland into a modern metropolis—and one that could now fuel its own civic institutions. Today such an acquisition demonstrates how the Brooklyn Museum was once open to local contemporary art, in an age when other nascent museums were fixated on the Old Masters.

Following the Civil War, as great museums took shape across the East River in Manhattan, the call went up for the city of Brooklyn to build "an Institute of Arts and Sciences worthy of her wealth, her position, her culture and her people." Situated at the intersection of the grand new parks and parkways designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, and soon to be linked by subways, the museum's new classical edifice designed by McKim, Mead & White in 1897 reflected the ideals of nineteenth-century Brooklyn. It also spoke to the ambitions of the director Franklin Hooper, who planned an institution some four times larger than the museum we see today. The current Eastern Parkway wing is but one side of what was designed to be a square building and the largest museum in the world.

Yet rather than following through on this grand vision, the Brooklyn Museum has for a century remained one of the world's great unfinished institutions—with a large parking lot on what was meant to be its footprint. Some of this can be attributed to the changing fortunes of Brooklyn. With Brooklyn's consolidation into greater New York City in 1898, the once independent city lost much of the energy behind its own civic mandates as it fell into the shadows of twentieth-century Manhattan. But the museum's leadership is also to blame, especially for a radical shift instituted by its progressive director Philip Newell Youtz in the 1930s.

Believing that the "museum of today must meet contemporary needs," Youtz attacked the founding mandates of his own institution as a citadel of artistic achievement. He vowed to "turn a useless Renaissance palace into a serviceable modern museum." Praising the educational practices of museums under the Soviet regime, Youtz undertook the transformation of his museum from a temple of contemplation into a school of instruction, where the arts were put in the service of progressive ends, and funding would derive from the state rather than private philanthropy. Youtz sought to transform his institution into a "socially oriented museum" with, as he stated, "a collection of people surrounded by objects, not a collection of objects surrounded by people."

He hired department store window-dressers to arrange exhibitions and transformed the collection of his composite museum into a parade of teachable moments.

He then turned his programmatic assault into a physical one. Historians question the ultimate motivation behind his demolition of the Brooklyn Museum's exterior Grand Staircase, which resembled the entrance of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and was meant to elevate the museum-goer from Eastern Parkway into the refined precincts of the museum. What is not in doubt is Youtz's belief that his iconoclasm, pushing the museum lobby down to street level, "improved" upon the McKim, Mead & White design. Recalling this destruction of the museum's patrimony, Linda S. Ferber recounts how Youtz intended it "as a socially responsible gesture, eliminating the grand ceremonial entry, which literally elevated the visitor to the level of the arts, in order to facilitate public access directly from the street." Continuing in this way, Youtz went about mutilating much of the museum's ornamental interior.

As the director of the Brooklyn Museum since 1997, Arnold Lehman has closely followed Youtz's lead. He has championed exhibitions with either heavy social components or populist appeal—or both, as in the case of 1999's "Sensation" show. He has taken the lead in demanding public funds while importing demotic displays on the costumes of *Star Wars*, photographs of rock stars, and (currently) "killer heels." He pumped attendance statistics with free late-night weekends filled with fashion shows, jewelry sales, music, and drinks. He gave ticket-buyers free rein to run through his halls, for example by hosting a regular scavenger hunt—billed as "part scavenger hunt, part obstacle course and ALL Brooklyn Museum"—with contestants "competing for classes at StripXpertease and Babeland." He destroyed the independence of the museum's traditional curatorial departments—tasked with maintaining what remained of the collections that the museum hadn't traded away—in order to centralize exhibitions under his administration. He even made his own mark on the museum's entrance, pushing Youtz's populist assault out towards Eastern Parkway with a radiating glass canopy. "I like people to think of [the museum] as their favorite park," he says.

Yet as with Youtz, Lehman's approach undermined rather than strengthened the foundations of the museum by mistaking the greatness of art for mere programmatic utility. At the same time, an intelligent public that Lehman had underestimated, far from rallying around their own edification, largely stayed away both as ticket buyers and museum supporters. "Brooklyn Museum's Populism Hasn't Lured Crowds," read a *New York Times* headline in 2010. Trustees resigned. Lehman even disbanded a community committee of supporters that had dated back to 1948.

This posture helps explain why the Brooklyn Museum has been slow to appreciate Brooklyn art, especially those artists who work without clear didactic agendas. For the museum, their art serves little use beyond fodder for contests, such as the reality television program "Work of Art: The Next Great Artist," or social experiments, such as "Go: A Community-curated Open Studio Project." To expect the museum to appreciate local art as a connoisseur, studying, guiding, and elevating the best to public attention, would be an affront to this progressive vision.

Yet just as Brooklyn art has flourished, so too has Brooklyn been reborn. The borough has shaken its defensive posture to become once again a leading metropolis, perhaps exceeding its nineteenth-century reach and confidence. This past September, Arnold Lehman announced he will step down in a year, and the search is on for the next leader. Lehman has been a likeable showman, perhaps the only sort of director who could survive in an overshadowed institution of diminishing returns. But the changing fortunes of the borough now call for a director who can draw on Brooklyn's civic strengths to build the museum into what its founders intended. The time has come for a Brooklyn Museum that is truly "worthy of her wealth, her position, her culture and her people"—and her artists.

New poems
by Michael Spence & Luke Stromberg

His Reason

What reason could a boy have to twist
The handle of hot all the way open,
Plunge his hands into the sink, palms

Pressed flat against the bottom?
To feel his skin electrified?
The pain stunning him motionless?

To keep his hands there till the boiling
Fogs his face in the mirror? To make his hands
Obey, to make them stay precisely

Where they're telling him so loudly they shouldn't be?
To defy his mother, the one now shouting:
My God, what are you doing? Letting her

Pull him free? The cooling as she rubs
His hands with cream? The hands he holds
Before her, red and new, stinging in the air.

—Michael Spence

The Elephant's Mouth

"What's it take to join the circus?" my father asked.
A gang of workers were putting up a tent,
Big hammers ringing on the pegs in rhythm.
"I'm thinking that I'd like to join up with you guys."

This was '45 or there about I'd guess
When the circus used to come to town each year.
My father was just a boy then, eight or nine.
Their train would rumble past his house on Guilford Road.

"Well, to join the circus," one offered, "you gotta be brave."
He leaned on his hammer, mopped his brow with his shirt.
"Are you brave, Kid?" he asked, appraising my father,
Who, conscious of the chuckling men, answered, "I'm
brave."

"Enough to stick your head up in an elephant's mouth?"
The workers gathered, happy for a break.
"I ain't afraid," he said, a bit less certain.
"Well, come on then—I know just the elephant!"

The animal was penned up in a tent nearby.
Pulling back the flap, the man said, "You're sure?"
"I'm sure," my father said, not sure at all,
Not when he saw it stamp its mud-splattered feet.

Held by his knees, my father was raised up to its mouth,
And he did it—stuck his head inside—
To the delight of all the roaring men.
Then eyes shut tight, pulled free, his bravery made clear.

Whatever my father felt inside that creature's mouth
I'll never know. I've looked at elephants
Chewing grass or slack-jawed in repose
And wondered: Is it hot in there? Do they have teeth?

"My eyes were closed," my father says, "I can't remember."
I try to place myself within that tent.
"You weren't even *thought of* then!" he laughs.
"I was a different person. So much has happened since."

He thinks they told him that he should come back when
he was older,
That he was Grade A circus material,
And gave him passes to the show that night,
Which must have been at least a little disappointing.

How does a kid go back to St. Cyril's after that?
Desks of unworldly children blotting ink,
A sister with her yardstick in the aisle,
The wide blackboard that seemed to bar the way to fun.

Within a few brief days, the tents were all brought down,
And then the neighborhood was taken back
By normal people and their normal tasks;
No snake-skinned man walked to the corner store for smokes.

One of the hardest things I've ever had to do
Was to let go of my belief—long held—
That I was set apart for something special,
Blessed by distinction like a high-wire trapeze artist.

And, to be honest, I'm not sure I have let go:
The illustrated woman haunts my nights
With promises of some lost and unclaimed life.
I have to will myself to go to work each day.

But sometime in his twenties, my father married my mother.
He sold his red hot rod convertible,
And then acquired a mortgage and raised five boys.
For thirty some odd years, he worked for the school district.

Today my father lives just blocks from Guilford Road.
No tent has gone up in the field for decades.
The tracks for the train aren't even there these days.
And he hardly can remember that elephant at all.

—Luke Stromberg

Reconsiderations

Augustus & the birth of the West

by Michael Auslin

Bereft of historical sensitivity and untutored in the milestones of world history, Americans let slip by, all but unnoticed, the bimillennium of the death of one of the truly towering figures in Western history. While the works of Alexander the Great and Napoleon disappeared with their exit from the stage of history, and where George Washington and Winston Churchill worked on a smaller canvas, Imperator Caesar Divi Filius Augustus created and dominated a political system that set the Western world on its path for the succeeding two thousand years. In forgetting the death of Rome's first emperor and ignoring his legacy, Americans continue to impoverish their understanding of the world they now bestride.

On August 19, 14 A.D., Augustus died peacefully at the age of seventy-seven, after ruling the Roman Empire and much of the civilized world for forty years. History continues to be fascinated with his uncle and adoptive father, Julius Caesar, but it was Augustus who succeeded where the brilliant Caesar had failed; it was Octavian (as he was then known) who emerged triumphant from the decades of civil war that consumed Republican Rome; it was a frail boy in his teens who first challenged, and then vanquished, some of the greatest names in history: Brutus, Cassius, Mark Antony. His chief political creation, the *principate*, survived in the western half of the empire for nearly 500 years after his death, and in an altered state for another full millennium in Constantinople, where the eastern Byzantine Empire kept alive many of the forms, cultural patterns, and laws of Rome.

Two thousand years after his death, the Rome that Augustus built is perhaps more popular than ever. A new generation of historians is publishing gripping histories and biographies of Rome and her greatest figures, including Augustus himself. Mystery novels set in both Republican and imperial Rome fill shelves in bookstores, while, only a few years ago, the lavishly produced *Gladiator* won the Academy Award for Best Picture. When President George W. Bush launched America into war with Iraq in 2003, a blizzard of opinion pieces, articles, and books questioned whether the United States had become an empire like Rome. Likewise, some see the European Union as only the latest manifestation of a dream to reunite a Europe that has been unnaturally divided since the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 A.D.

None of that would have happened, and indeed the West itself would not exist as we know it, without Augustus's extraordinary achievement. Few today know much about his deeds. Perhaps that is due to the fact that his life and actions have been the source of disagreement among classicists for generations. The pre-war British historian Ronald Syme saw Augustus as little more than the thuggish leader of a faction, summing up the sanguinary record of the *princeps* in his classic *The Roman Revolution* (1939) thusly: "When a party has triumphed in violence and seized control of the State, it would be plain folly to regard the new government as a collection of amiable and virtuous characters."

On a contrary view, H. H. Scullard, in his survey *From the Gracchi to Nero* (1959, 1982), saw Augustus as a savior: "the ruthlessness of youth was replaced by an unshakeable sense of duty . . . ; proceeding by trial and error, he succeeded where a more doctrinaire approach would have led to disaster." More recently, Anthony Everitt lauded the first emperor as a cautious, moderate, and simple-living man who brought peace and stability to a world wracked by internecine fighting (*Augustus*, 2006). As happens so often in the case of great figures of history, all these interpreters are right in their assessments of his character.

What is indisputable is that Augustus created an enduring concept of political stability: a devil's bargain between security and freedom, where real power was disguised by the trappings of shared authority (in his case, a "restored" republic with a *dyarchy* between *princeps* and Senate), and where the interests of state demanded a seriousness and probity of character that remained the ideal long after the reality of imperial licentiousness provided a focus for all subsequent anti-monarchist sensibilities.

The magnitude of Augustus's accomplishment is hard to overstate. By the time young Octavian threw himself into the civil wars, Rome had been wracked for nearly a century by ever-worsening cycles of political conflict. The first political violence that had spilled blood inside Rome in hundreds of years—the killing of the populist tribune Tiberius Gracchus by his political opponents in 133 B.C.—fatally upset the delicate balance among patricians, plebians, the military, Romans, and non-Romans, drawing in ever more groups of antagonists to use public power for personal ends and twist the organs of state to factional use. Many, at the time and after, have decried as a cause of the erosion of republican morals the wealth that poured into Rome from conquest in the East and from the domination of the Mediterranean world that Rome achieved with the destruction of Carthage in the final Punic War that ended in 146 B.C.

When Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon in 49, it seemed as though disorder had become the natural way of things. The Senate had long ceased to be an effective body, and violent factions had taken over public business and corrupted Rome's actions abroad. The dictator Sulla had foreshadowed Rome's fate by marching his troops into the city in 88 B.C., thereby legitimizing the use of what were now essentially private armies to settle political disputes. The decline of the citizen army and its transformation into bands loyal to their commander had itself taken shape under the influence of Sulla's great enemy, Marius, in the previous decades. Thus, in just half a century, from roughly 100–50, Republican Rome's domestic consensus, political effectiveness, and security structure had degraded beyond repair. A crisis was inevitable.

After the Ides of March, the teenaged Octavian figured in no one's political calculations. Mark Antony was the dominant figure, and Brutus and Cassius retained significant forces. Yet within just a few years, it would be Antony and Octavian fighting for the ultimate supremacy of the Western world. To read of Octavian's cautious, calculating, and sure moves during the two decades of civil war, leading to his victory at Actium in 31 B.C., is to encounter political genius of the rarest kind. With his indispensable partner, Agrippa, Octavian then did what had escaped even the great Caesar: establish a durable and impregnable political system to capitalize on his military victory. Thus ended both a century of civil war and Rome's traditional freedoms. To a world desperate for stability, Augustus was accepted as the unquestioned and irreplaceable arbiter of order.

Augustus's legacy did not stop with politics, for the Rome of our dreams, too, is largely his creation, carried to its ultimate expression by his successors. The world might not still be fascinated with a city of brick had not Augustus left it one of marble, to paraphrase his famous saying. The fora, baths, Colosseum, and palaces of eternal Rome maintained, even enhanced, their spell over men's imaginations by their ruins, as much as in their pristine prime. Even the anti-monarchical Americans drew legitimacy from Rome's material forms. Washington, D.C. is modeled more on impe-

rial Rome than Greece, with its Capitol Hill and classic architecture.

Yet even here, Augustus's achievement is not uncritically praised. The classicist Edith Hamilton, in her *Roman Way to Western Civilization* (1932), bemoaned the Romans' materialism and pedestrian pride in the abundance of the things they possessed, seeing it as a fatal flaw in their character. Whereas Athens was the "school of Greece," in Pericles' ringing words, Augustus was a mere, if grandiose, property developer, in Hamilton's view. From there, it was a short step to bread and circuses, the deadening of the human spirit, and the Rome of brutality and oppression, despite the lingering example of the Spartan-like lifestyle of the Western world's master, an irony no less powerful twenty centuries later.

Possibly, Rome's history would have turned out differently, and been far less bloody, with a different set of post-Augustus emperors, perhaps descending from his preferred heir, his nephew Marcellus. Even the majestic Augustus, however, could not cheat Death of his wages of the Julian clan, leaving only an unwanted stepson, Tiberius, to carry on the imperial line. That, however, is to view Rome through a modern sentimental glass, imposing a contemporary sensibility on a race of warriors who had been constantly at battle for centuries by the time Augustus closed the doors of the Temple of Janus after his victory over Mark Antony, thereby symbolizing the end of war.

Little of this would matter to us had Rome not been mistress of the ancient world. Empire is what continues to draw our modern attention: some to praise it, some to bury the concept. Succeeding centuries of war, ethnic cleansing, inquisitions, and the like have made the dream of *pax Romana* a constant siren's call, regardless of the brutality that by necessity created the conditions of stability. The idea of global order, of commonwealth and cosmopolitanism, has been a shimmering mirage alike for those who glorify power and those who seek a brotherhood of man.

Here, too, the West continues to idealize what Augustus conserved. Building on the generations of Roman conquest, most recently on the great additions of Caesar and Pompey, he fixed the Empire's borders, established efficient provincial governance, and gave the Senate back some of its imperial responsibilities. This allowed the Roman genius for practical administration and engineering to transform the empire's lands during the next several centuries, leaving a material and political legacy that provided the seeds for Europe's ultimate revival. Charlemagne, Napoleon, and Hitler were just a few of the more ambitious aspirants to Augustus's legacy, none of whom, however, could replicate what he created.

Instead, the closest successors to Augustus have been the impersonal British and American global hegemonies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which are less concerned with territorial control than with imposing a form of value-inspired international order. The world has benefitted as greatly from the largely liberal policies of London and Washington as it did from the rule of the emperors. Trade, development, scholarship, law, even tourism, have all flourished in our past century and a half of international order, just as they did under Rome's tutelage. Even the three great wars of the twentieth century (if one includes the Cold War) did little to interrupt the progress of *pax liberalis*.

Today, Augustus is perhaps most relevant in light of our struggles to maintain that global order. The idea of empire that he fashioned has become distorted over the centuries to reflect the prejudices of its critics. As the inheritors of a long era of decolonization and national self-determination, our eyes are trained to see Augustus's kind of order as little more than brute control. Oppression there was, to be sure, but also flexibility and autonomy. There is more similarity between the Roman and American historical experiences of empire than appears on the surface, but also far less than the criticisms of those who simply condemn the use of power abroad. Both powers shared elements of capriciousness—and made disastrous decisions—but both also provided the reality and hope of order that allowed other fruits of human effort to flower.

The great struggle today is to settle on what kind of international order is best. Revisionist powers such as Russia and China seek to return to a nineteenth-century model of power politics based on cynicism and grievance. On the other side of the spectrum, those who believe in co-operation and multilateral approaches betake of an idealism that assumes a type of universal rationality and the possibility of change in human nature. Yet Augustus lived through decades in which human nature was revealed at its most base, and in which rationality could be claimed equally by Cicero, in his defense of the traditional Republic, and by Julius Caesar, in his destruction of it. Only Augustus cut the Gordian knot by providing both order and an illusion of political freedom that nonetheless contained elements of true individual liberty. That his successors did not equally maintain the balance does not detract from its revolutionary nature.

America today may be the world's only superpower, but the coming decades look to be more unstable, both at home and abroad, than even the unsettled recent ones. There remains much for us to learn from Augustus's life and times: from the corrosive effects of faction and governing incompetence to the desperate need for a vision of the future that is both inspiring and also rooted in reality. Above all, there is the lesson on the eternal need for order. Discovering how to achieve it without limiting our own precious freedom would serve as a fitting coda to the last 2,000 years of Western history. The anniversary of Caesar Augustus's death provides an excuse to look back, so as to understand our future better.

Theater

Crowded house

by Kevin D. Williamson

In the days before the Second Vatican Council, the ordinary practice for Catholic priests celebrating Mass was to stand with their backs to the congregation, facing the altar, the idea being that the priest was not putting on a show for an audience but leading a community in worship. When that changed, and priests fell into the habit of facing the congregation, the act of worship was transformed into an act of theater—the folk guitars and interpretative dance and horrible sub-"Kumbaya" hymns were subsequently inevitable. A strangely inverted version of that process has been at work in the theater for some time: The old joke in Christian churches was that the congregation was there to "pray, pay, and obey." The contemporary theater is two-thirds of the way there: That the audience is there to pay goes without saying, though getting them to obey is not always easy. And as playwrights, directors, and producers have turned their backs on the audience—the role which is either incidental or economic—they have turned to face that which passes for the Divine in their world: themselves.

The Country House is not a bad play; in fact, it is a reasonably well written and tastefully staged play—and I could not wait for it to be over. It is partly a piece of stunt writing by Donald Margulies, an attempt to synthesize something new from two of Chekhov's country-house plays, *The Seagull* and *Uncle Vanya*. It is partly a Freudian family romance that plays upon the similarities between unrequited sexual love and unsatisfactory family relationships. But it is mainly a long meditation on the subject of how fascinating theater people are that ends up being a very convincing demonstration of how fascinating theater people aren't. Perhaps mine is a minority view: After warning that such "backstage plays" tend toward self-indulgence, the estimable Terry Teachout of *The Wall Street Journal* argues that *The Country House* "is one of the most disciplined and satisfying new American plays to reach Broadway in the past decade." Disciplined, perhaps; satisfying, no.

The dramatic center of the play is Blythe Danner's Anna, an aging theatrical actress in professional and mental decline. Desperate to stay in the game, she is setting up housekeeping with her extended family, most of them theater veterans of varying degrees of success, in her family's summer home in Williamstown, where she is playing the titular madam in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. Both Mr. Margulies's writing of the character and Ms. Danner's performance carry about themselves more than a little brimstone whiff of Gloria Swanson's Norma Desmond, punctuated by deliberate attempts to deflate Anna before she descends into melodrama. The effect is manic-depressive: Anna enters the first scene with a sort of Cruella de Vil flourish, insisting: "I am not one whose entrances go unnoticed." A once-famous actress playing a once-famous actress comments upon the dramatic quality of her entrances while making a dramatic entrance: That sort of meta-joke might have been fresh in 1978, but in 2014 it feels like the

paint-by-numbers version of writing a play. I half-expected some opera-style supertitle to appear above the stage, reading: "LOOK HOW CLEVER DONALD MARGULIES IS!"

Offering one of her several homilies about the declining quality and relevance of the theater, Anna once again descends into half-clever meta-commentary. "There are no more Broadway stars," she insists. "There are stars on Broadway, but there are no Broadway stars." That modern celebrity should be deprecated vis-à-vis some imagined golden age of stardom is a completely understandable sentiment coming from the mouth of an actress who was herself once a household name but who today is known mainly for being the mother of Gwyneth Paltrow, whose form of celebrity is a particularly loathsome and detestable one.

What happens in *The Country House* is this: Anna convenes the extended family to keep her company and to help her study up for *Mrs. Warren's Profession*; the one member of the family who is not directly involved in theater, her granddaughter, Susie (Sarah Steele), cracks wise and makes easy jokes about undergraduate life at Yale; Anna's sad-sack son, Elliott (Eric Lange), gets drunk, complains about his lack of success, and makes everybody uncomfortable; the former son-in-law, Walter (David Rasche), the widower of Anna's late daughter, Kathy, and father to Susie, has a raging midlife crisis complete with a convertible Porsche and a much younger new girlfriend, Nell (Kate Jennings Grant), whom he is, in a fit of extraordinarily bad taste, introducing to his daughter and the rest of the family over the course of a weekend informally organized around marking the one-year anniversary of the death of his wife. Complicating matters, the handsome television star Michael (Daniel Sunjata), who abandoned serious theater to get rich making dopey television series, is staying with the family while performing a summer's worth of artistic penance on stage at the Williamstown Theater Festival.

The interplay between doing what is imagined to be high art and doing what is necessary to make a living provides much of the play's humor. Elliott rages at Walter for getting rich making lowbrow teen movies (*Truck Stop IV* is the auteur's latest effort) and at Michael, who plays a star-trekking physician in a science-fiction franchise. Elliott himself has never had enough artistic success to sell out or enough commercial success to feel guilty about it. To make things worse, he is still nursing an ancient crush on the woman who is now Walter's girlfriend (soon to be fiancée) and is convinced that his mother neither loved him as much as she did his late sister nor respects him as much as she does Walter, a sometime professional collaborator. He bemoans his own state in life: "I'm ready to give up acting. Well, that's not entirely accurate. In order to give up acting I have to have *been* acting. But announcing that I'm ready to give up auditioning doesn't have quite the same impact."

The second source of drama is Michael's effect on the women in the play. Anna and her granddaughter both throw themselves at him, and an almost consummated flirtation with Nell sends the family's emotional simmer into full boil. Not content with seducing the living, Michael also turns out to be an ex-lover of the late Kathy.

Much of the writing is drearily predictable; echoing the old Hollywood joke that there are only two roles for women—the sex kitten and the district attorney—Nell complains that she has graduated "from the hot neighbor to the single mother practically overnight." The acting is capable, and the production, under the direction of Daniel Sullivan, is remarkable in that there is practically nothing upon which to remark. The country-house setting is conventionally constructed, with stairs and multiple doorways used for conventional dramatic purposes. Conventional theater often provides a refreshing break from the self-indulgence and pointlessly voguish experimentation of the self-proclaimed avant garde. What *The Country House* lacks is not innovation but imagination. We are meant to laugh at Michael's space doctor, but to cling to fascinations so close to home, as so many playwrights have before, is a bit like camping in one's own back yard. Mr. Margulies did not necessarily need to go where no man has gone before, but to go where so many men have gone before, with so little

distinction, is a bit like a trip to Mrs. Warren's establishment: Buy the ticket, enjoy the performance—but the performance is such that one never imagines it to be anything more than that. When Walter responds to Elliott's criticism of his commercial endeavors, he scoffs at the belief that "one form of make-believe is better than another." But some forms of make believe really are better than others: Some are more imaginative, more moving, more insightful, more powerful.

And less self-involved.

There is a play-within-the-play element to Tom Stoppard's 1982 exploration of marital infidelity, *The Real Thing*, recently revived by the Roundabout Theatre Company with a cast full of those stars-on-Broadway-but-not-Broadway-stars we heard about in *The Country House*: Ewan McGregor, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Cynthia Nixon, and Josh Hamilton—that's *Star Wars*, *Batman*, *Sex and the City*, and *American Horror Story*, respectively. Yes, yes, all fine actors—Ms. Nixon (Mrs. Christine Marinoni? What exactly is the protocol?) was surprisingly powerful in a recent production of *Wit* (*The New Criterion*, April 2012) and famously starred in a 1983 production of this very play while simultaneously acting in *Hurlyburly*, both shows under the direction of Mike Nichols. In 1983, Ms. Nixon played the younger woman, Debbie, the role currently occupied by Madeline Weinstein; like Al Pacino graduating from young hotshot Ricky Roma to beaten-down has-been Shelly Levine in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, Ms. Nixon in the role of Charlotte is making if not the most then whatever she can out of pitiless age. The play itself is cruel on the subject of age, characterizing Annie (Ms. Gyllenhaal) as a woman "very much like the woman Charlotte has ceased to be."

The director Sam Gold and the set designer David Zinn invest the play with an intriguing mid-century aesthetic, from the modish furniture to the old-style turntables and speakers from which our hero, the playwright Henry (Mr. McGregor) derives what appears to be the only non-romantic joy in his life, listening to old bubblegum pop music from the 1950s and 1960s. For Henry, the height of musical seriousness is Buddy Holly, whom he idly compares to Beethoven: "If Beethoven had been killed in a plane crash at 22, the history of music would have been very different. As would the history of aviation, of course." It feels like a slightly easy laugh for the cerebral Tom Stoppard.

The play opens with Charlotte (Ms. Nixon) coming home to her bitter, biting husband, Max (Josh Hamilton), who has learned that she is being unfaithful to him. With a relentless and dramatic display of wit, he disassembles her story about having been abroad on business for the weekend bit-by-bit, until she storms out. In the second scene, Charlotte is not married to Max but to Henry, and Max is a mutual friend of the couple, as is his wife, Annie (Ms. Gyllenhaal). The first scene turns out to be from a play that Henry is writing—a play that Charlotte thinks very little of, dismissing it as being so enraptured with the mental workings of its male protagonist that it never satisfactorily answers the question of why, or even if, adultery was in fact afoot. And that of course is because in the real world, Henry and Annie are the adulterers, and Charlotte probably is one, too, though not the hapless Max. Henry and Annie soon throw over their respective spouses, casting them aside like old newspapers, with Annie wondering, almost innocently, at the fact that her happiness requires Max's misery. Mr. Stoppard is too intelligent to allow this silly sentiment to pass as though it were an observation of a natural law.

That two people whose sexual attachment began in mutual adultery should settle into a domestic peace that is necessarily uneasy is not exactly uncharted dramatic territory, but Mr. Stoppard is one of the most gifted playwrights of his time, and he limns the story gracefully. I am in general not much of an admirer of Mr. McGregor or of Ms. Gyllenhaal, but both performances are excellent. Henry, as it turns out, is a romantic in the classical model—even with his own experience of adultery and betrayal, he believes in the possibility of fidelity and exclusivity, that the world can in fact be reduced to two categories of people: the beloved, and everybody else. Ms. Gyllenhaal,

famous for her dark sexual appeal in spite of her not being conventionally attractive, is an interesting and highly effective choice for Annie. Approaching forty, she is not an ingénue, trivially younger than Mr. McGregor though very fresh in comparison to Ms. Nixon, who here gives the impression of being considerably older than her forty-eight years. There is something slippery about Ms. Gyllenhaal—even when she's playing a solid citizen, there is something about her that would make one hesitate to lend her money or let her drive your car. When Annie takes an interest in the "political prisoner" Brodie (Alex Breaux)—who has been jailed for vandalism after setting fire to a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier—the potential sexual aspect of the relationship can be assumed.

Henry is soon reduced to the worst sort of cuckold. He is writing popular television scripts for money, but he has failed to write a play about his love for Annie, unable to make something sufficiently dramatic out of the prosaic material of his domestic and sexual satisfaction. Annie, meanwhile, is having an open affair with Billy (Ronan Raftery), an actor who is playing a character based on Brodie in a play (or a play-shaped pile of words) the semi-literate young vandal has written about himself. Making things worse, Annie insists that Brodie's story has some sort of merit that transcends literary or dramatic value, and so she prevails upon Henry to rework it into something that can be presented to the public. When the much-heard-about-but-unseen Brodie finally appears on the scene, he scoffs at Henry's editorial improvements on the play, as though illiteracy were a form of authenticity—as though English were not his native language. In the predictable pattern of thuggish young radicals everywhere, he reviles the liberal intellectuals who would be his advocates and patrons.

As I have argued before in these pages, stories about adultery are, in these debased days, a hard sell. Conjuring up a world in which monogamous marriage is a going concern and in which infidelity must be hidden and justified rather than proclaimed as a means of self-actualization is not quite so mighty a feat of imagination as putting one's self in the world of the Bacchae or Cuchulain, but it feels increasingly similar. Marital monogamy is a bit like Henry's beloved vinyl collection—connoisseurs appreciate the superiority of the high-fidelity medium, but the masses have moved on to file-sharing.

To Mr. McGregor's credit, Henry's final agony struck me as being as near to a fully expressed depiction of a genuine, specific, identifiable human emotion as I can remember having seen on stage in many years, in contrast to Elliott's similar scene at the climax of *The Country House*, which seemed to me alien and inexplicable. Likewise, Mr. Stoppard's dramatic constructions are an architecture as splendidly austere as a Richard Meier building. But there is something about them that feels beside the point.

In fact, these plays-within-plays and theater about theater increasingly strike me as being categorically sterile. Big-time theater seems to be evolving into two distinct species: Shallow, popular spectacle along the lines of *Wicked* and *Beautiful* on the one hand, and wallowing, self-referential introspection into theater *per se* on the other. Given the modest intellectual and artistic ambitions at work in the theater at large, it is understandable that in the case of something such as *The Book of Mormon*, the merely clever can masquerade as the spectacular. *The Country House* is competent, but nothing more, and *The Real Thing* is interesting mainly in its ability to relate the aesthetic of a particular period to its ethic, which must be of limited interest to those who do not share my taste for the period in question. If there is a big idea lurking backstage somewhere, a fresh and revealing dramatic sensibility waiting to present itself, I have seen very little evidence of it.

Art

London chronicle

by Christie Davies

J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851) and John Constable (1776–1837) were the greatest landscape painters of their age, and it is excellent that they are simultaneously being celebrated in major exhibitions in two of the leading galleries in London, the city where they both earned their high reputations.[1] They were, of course, also rivals and some of England's sillier critics have chosen to see these parallel exhibitions as a continuation of that rivalry, in the form of a rivalry between Tate Britain, which has major holdings of Turner, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, which received a large bequest of paintings from Constable's last surviving child and is the main center for the study of his work. The comparison is pointless, even odious, for the exhibitions are telling very different stories about two distinctively different English artists united only by their greatness. Each exhibition has to be seen on its own terms and each of the artists on his.

Tate Britain has put on a remarkably comprehensive exhibition of the late work of J. M. W. Turner, from 1835, when he turned sixty, to 1850, the year before his death. By the standards of the first half of the nineteenth century, Turner was by then an old man, and his detractors saw in his work evidence of senility. The curators have been able to show how false that accusation was and to demonstrate the continued vitality of his art and his ability to innovate and experiment endlessly.

Turner continued to make strenuous tours of Europe until he was seventy, observing the scenery and way of life of Venice, France, Germany, and Switzerland, and studying their history and culture; he went as far afield as Denmark and Bohemia. Every spring and autumn he would go abroad, where he worked incessantly, filling his sketchbooks with the bases for future paintings to be completed in the winter back home. His annual trips to Switzerland produced a large set of watercolors, now on display in the exhibition, including his masterpiece *The Blue Rigi, Sunrise* (1842). In it, a solid blue three-dimensional mountain hangs in the mist before a calm lake and Venus the morning star peers brightly through the sky. A duck—possibly his punning trademark mallard—leaves the water to avoid the arrival of people brought out by the sunrise and flies towards the reflection of a dark, perfectly placed boat. Turner was at the height of his powers.

There is great variety in the work of the late Turner, both variety of style and variety of choice of subject, and he was ever the innovator. The curator, Samuel Smiles, is right to stress that the rigidity of age did not affect Turner. In later life, Turner, now living in London with his mistress, the Widow Booth, liked to dress like a sailor and to call himself Admiral Booth, which was not a sign of deranged eccentricity, as his critics alleged, but a piece of playfulness with its own inner rationality. He needed to hide his irregular

1 "The EY Exhibition: Late Turner—Painting Set Free" opened at Tate Britain, London, on September 10, 2014 and remains on view through January 25, 2015; "Constable: The Making of a Master" opened at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, on September 20, 2014 and remains on view through January 11, 2015.

sexual relationship with Mrs. Booth from an increasingly censorious Victorian public, and he was also in love with the sea. He had never been to the Arctic, but he studied accounts and illustrations of its rough and freezing seas and talked to whalers to produce a set of remarkable whaling pictures, notably *A Harpooned Whale* and *Whales* (1845), done when Turner was seventy, for his patron Elhanan Bicknell who had made his fortune in that business. *Whales*, with its sketchy sea and sky, ghostly white sails of a whaling ship, and whale—a deep black oblong emerging, bleeding, from a dark patch of water—was the modern masterpiece of its day, though it got a very mixed reception. But the Connecticut sailor Captain Eli Elisha Morgan, who had become a friend of Turner, was adamant that the painter had "a real feel for the sea." Turner the painter, now playing the old sea dog, proved that he could learn new tricks. He did so not just to find new patrons, such as Bicknell, for in his old age he was very rich from the shrewd investments he had made in the past; he could afford to innovate just for the joy of experimenting and producing pictures that he would keep for his own pleasure.

Turner's later subjects ranged from historical studies of the ancient world, based on his knowledge of Virgil and Ovid, to his famous *Rain, Steam and Speed—The Great Western Railway* (1844). A steam locomotive with a tall, black smoke stack rushes towards us, through a landscape blurred by rain, at the unheard-of speed of thirty miles an hour. A startled hare, a symbol of the old rural Britain, races frantically along the track in front of the train, trying to outpace it. To get to the Turner exhibition, I travelled on the same Great Western railroad by diesel at three times the speed of Turner's train, which today looks quaint. But like Turner himself, the train was modern and exciting in its own time, and Turner had painted a modern phenomenon in a modern way, something that not only baffled, but annoyed many of his contemporaries, who had no frame of reference by which to judge his later work.

The critics' anger grew as his experiments led to even more "blurred," abstract, and less well-finished paintings. John Ruskin, who had championed Turner's early work, which he had called "true to nature" and had seen as uplifting moral allegories, now declared that Turner's penchant for the dramatic vortex was "indicative of mental disease." There is a certain irony in this, given Ruskin's own life-long mental instability, a madness that worsened over time, culminating in the fit of rage that led to the libel action with James Whistler and the collapse of Ruskin's mind thereafter.

More recently, it has been claimed that in his last years Turner's eyesight deteriorated from diabetes and cataracts, and that this affected his ability to deal with colors at the red end of the spectrum. In relation to his paired set of "circle within a square" oil paintings *The Dawn of Christianity (The Flight into Egypt)* (1841) and *Glaucus and Scylla* (1841), such critics contrast the masterly handling of the blues and the whites of sky and river, in the former, with the strange reds, oranges, and yellows of its companion. This point has been even more forcibly made in relation to Turner's *War, the Exile and the Rock Limpet* (1842); like the earlier pair, it is in the Tate exhibition. Here the unmistakeable figure of Napoleon on St. Helena, his turbulent military career over, contemplates the contented stability of a limpet on a rock against a background that is a sea of blood. It has been compared unfavorably with its companion painting, *Peace—Burial at Sea* (1842), which has a somber black ship and even blacker sails against the sky—funeral black sails appropriate to the burial at sea of his friend and fellow artist, David Wilkie. In the almost-as-dark foreground, a mallard flees—the punning emblem, the rebus of James Mallord William Turner. Yet how can anyone be sure that this is merely evidence of deteriorating eyesight and nothing else? The Turner who worshipped the sun and had experienced the unnaturally lurid skies of 1816, caused by the ash from a huge volcanic explosion in the Dutch East Indies, may well have wanted these vivid colors. Anyway, why should it matter? For the viewer it may well seem right and proper that Napoleon, that callously ambitious man of blood, should be placed in a blood-red landscape, much as the peace of the dead is appropriately marked by sails blacker than the night.

Samuel Smiles and his colleagues have successfully rescued Turner's later work from such

calumnies. These were not his declining years, but a time when his capacity for innovation led him to outdistance the tastes and capacities of his contemporaries; it was Ruskin who was becoming a fossil. Even the eccentricities, which were used as evidence that Turner had, in all senses, lost it, make sense.

The curators make clear their view that Turner's work should not be seen as a simple, steady shift towards abstraction or impressionism. There are no marked breaks in his style, no relinquishing of his own past.Even in his later years, he regularly looked back to his earlier work and themes, sometimes painting classical historical subjects in the old way, sometimes finding new ways of painting earlier ideas and at times repainting earlier pictures. He is best seen not as a man of the future, but as a prescient man of his own present; one conscious of his own past career and of the past as well as the transient character of European and British society. He was a painter for all time.

A mile or so away at the V & A, an exhibition of the work of the great English landscape painter John Constable succeeds in doing what its title "The Making of a Master" indicates. It conveys with great clarity an understanding of how Constable became one of the great European masters of landscape painting and, indeed, of how he made himself. Constable's heroes were Rubens, Claude, Poussin, and Jacob van Ruisdael, and he was also influenced by Gainsborough, by the Welsh artist Thomas Jones of Pencerrig, and by the watercolors of Thomas Girtin. The exceptionally well-read Constable was very much a thinking and self-aware artist who wrote about his contemporaries and made outstanding copies of the many works of the old masters; he owned 5,000 prints of the classic painters and many books of prints and drawings, particularly landscapes.

In a very revealing section of the exhibition Constable's skill as a copyist is displayed. The curators have hung Constable's *Winter After Jacob van Ruisdael* (1839) alongside the painting that inspired it, Jacob van Ruisdael's *Winter Landscape*, from the late 1660s. Constable borrowed van Ruisdael's landscape from the British statesman Sir Robert Peel in order to make the copy. Peel was sufficiently disturbed by the likeness between the two that he insisted that Constable should make some changes to his own version. Constable added his trademark dog. Likewise, Claude's *Landscape with Goatherd and Goats* (1636–37) has been placed alongside Constable's *Landscape with Goatherd and Goats, after Claude* (1823). For Constable, producing these facsimiles was an exercise in training his own skills, particularly in capturing the subtle qualities of clouds and of trees, but it raises disturbing questions. Given how good they are, should the fact of their being copies devalue them? How would we regard them, if, by some mischance, the originals had been destroyed and yet we knew Constable's paintings to be copies? Even when not copying, Constable was often clearly following particular landscape paintings of his predecessors and, judging from the exhibits, his versions may well be the more pleasing of the two.

Just as interesting is the influence on Constable of his own lesser-known British contemporaries also shown in the exhibition. Thomas Girtin would sit in the rain in Wales to observe and record clouds and storms. Constable knew Girtin's vivid watercolor *A Grand View of Snowdon (View near Beddgelert, North Wales)* (1799) on display in the exhibition. It was to influence his own watercolor *View in Borrowdale* (1806), an unusual foray for Constable out of his familiar, placid southern and eastern England into the fashionably wild and picturesque mountains of the west and north, in this case, the Lake District. Constable remained all his life strongly attached to the soft contours of the fair, flat, and fluvial country where Suffolk borders Essex. Thomas Jones, from the same Welsh landscape school as Richard Wilson, showed his talent for placing clouds in a landscape in the series of studies he did on and of the hilly estate he owned in Radnorshire, notably *Carneddau Mountains from Pencerrig* (1776) and *Pencerrig* (1772), in which the top two-thirds of the paintings consist of clouds. Skies are, as Kenneth Clark noted, a speciality of British landscape painting in a country where the weather changes so rapidly. Nowhere is this more true than in Wales.

Constable became the great cloud expert, producing many studies in oil that are just depictions of patterns of cloud, such as his *Study of Cirrus Clouds* (1821–22). He too was willing to get wet

when working out-of-doors. On his honeymoon in Dorset, Constable painted *Weymouth Bay, Bowleaze Cove* (1816), in oil on board, which still has the marks on it of raindrops that landed while his paint was still wet. The rain came from the crowd of dark clouds, sweeping in from the sea, that dominate the painting. The clouds are pierced at just one point by a ray of light, which picks out, against the dull fawn sand the sharp black and white clothes of a strolling couple, the Vicar of Osmington, Constable's close friend John Fisher, who had recently officiated at the artist's wedding, and the vicar's wife. A minute later, they must have been drenched, just as the painter obviously was. But, at this point, the painting demands that they must be caught in a brief moment of high illumination. Constable, ever the master, knew this and stayed in the rain to capture it.

There is always in Constable's pictures a bright figure—a boy in a red jacket, a woman in white, or a man wearing a jet-black hat—placed in exactly the right position to offset the landscape. We see a black-hatted bishop in *Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Grounds* (1823), standing with his bright-gowned daughter, to the side of Constable's depiction of the famous high and slender spire of the cathedral, seen against a changing sky and contained within trees whose upper branches meet to form a frame, but one designedly without symmetry.

The Bishop of Salisbury, the uncle of the lesser clergyman seen strolling on the beach in *Weymouth Bay*, was a wealthy patron and commissioner of pictures as well as a friend to the artist. He demanded, successfully, that a dark cloud that had been placed in the sky by Constable, to provide contrast and movement, should be removed. Vicars can get wet, but a bishop must have a serene sky above his cathedral. A cathedral spire is no place for a sign of the wrath of God, unless of course the sky is softened by a rainbow, the sign of the covenant with Noah, which is to be found in Constable's later *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* (1832). In the very large portrayals of the Suffolk countryside that were to establish Constable's reputation—*The Hay Wain* (1821), *The Leaping Horse* (1825), and *The Cornfield* (1826)—it is the man or boy with the red jacket or the horse with the red harness that provides the necessary brief gap in the rich green of the scenery. Stand up close and you see one painting; step away and you find another.

What is welcome in the exhibition, and novel to it, is that we can see here not only the great finished paintings by Constable, including the ones of the Suffolk landscape, but also his preparatory work for them, including full-scale sketches done in oil. In this way, the curators have guided us to see how he used the sketches to balance out the final version and have allowed us to perceive the final changes that he chose to make. We are brought to an understanding of how the famous great works were made.

It is fitting that the V & A should mount a major exhibition of the English landscape painter John Constable, for the museum has become the central site for the study of his work, making good use of the large collection of his paintings and sketches that it received from his last surviving daughter. Mark Evans and his colleagues are to be congratulated both on the exhibition and on the accompanying book, which amply justify the museum's reputation for Constable scholarship.

Exhibition notes

"Cubism:
The Leonard A. Lauder Collection"
The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
October 20, 2014–February 16, 2015

Leonard A. Lauder has one nice apartment. This observation should be fairly self-evident. Lauder was, after all, chief executive of Estée Lauder, the cosmetics giant of which he is now Chairman Emeritus. His digs are likely to be spectacular—and not worth mentioning, particularly in an exhibition review. Still, the issue will be raised for anyone attending "Cubism: The Leonard A. Lauder Collection": The first items encountered are two huge photographs of the Lauder residence, its elegant environs festooned with myriad blue-chip artworks. Did the Met really need to remind us that the rich lead different lives? This introductory moment of hubris is offset by the exhibition itself and, not least, Lauder's generosity. Given the supercharged state of the art market, he could have cashed in

his collection of Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Juan Gris, and Fernand Léger to the tune of—yes, that's right—one billion dollars. Instead, the Lauder homestead has been emptied of its treasure trove. The paintings, works-on-paper, and sculptures featured in "Cubism," eighty-one pieces in total, are a promised gift to the Met and the rest of us as well.

Truth be told, our greatest museum's collection of twentieth-century art has never been that great. The Met's relationship with modern and contemporary art has been rife with false starts, misguided decisions, and significant bungles. The collection is renowned as much for glaring omissions as for the scattering of masterworks it can rightfully claim. When the Lila Acheson Wallace Wing—the section of the museum dedicated exclusively to twentieth-century art—opened in 1987, Hilton Kramer, writing in these pages, bluntly asked: "*Who needs it?*" The Met, Kramer went on, "does not even have the shadow of a twentieth-century collection of the size and substance which this elephantine facility calls for." As architecture, the Wallace Wing continues to be a Chinese box of pinched and ungainly galleries. Thomas Campbell, the museum's current director, has rued its museological unsuitability. Still, the Met's "shadow" collection has gained substance over the past three decades. The Lauder Collection will bring greater credibility to the Met's dribs-and-drabs take on Modernism. Lauder's gift is, in fact, among the most significant in the museum's history.

Hyperbole? Hardly—if anything, it's an understatement. Even in a city with no shortage of Cubist masterworks, "Cubism" is a thrilling reminder of the movement's primacy. It's exhausting, too. How many great pictures can a body stand? If there are more than a half- dozen so-so works in The Lauder Collection, good luck finding them. Lauder came late to Cubism, acquiring the first pieces in 1976. The "shock of the new" had long since dissipated; Cubism was, for those with the cash to spend, an easy sell and increasingly difficult to come by. That didn't prevent Lauder from amassing a collection that should be the envy of any museum you'd care to name, including the Museum of Modern Art. The consistency of the Lauder Collection is so unremitting that even the most doctrinaire Picassophile may forgive the absence of a seminal work like *Les Desmoiselles d'Avignon*. Besides, at a historical moment when MOMA's permanent collection has been reshuffled for the sake of this-or-that trend—not fatally, mind you, but enough to make one worry about its vital signs—who's to say The Met, with the Lauder gift in tow, won't become the go-to stop for early Modernism?

The Lauder Collection includes two studies for *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, as well as *Three Nudes* (1906), a diaphanous Rose Period sketch for a never-realized painting that may depict a brothel, and certainly evinces a young Picasso beginning to disrupt the conventions of pictorial space. Elsewhere, we see Picasso and his fellow "mountaineer" in Cubism, George Braque, tussle with the pictorial fracturing put in motion by Cézanne, and subsequently watch them disrupt representation without sacrificing it altogether. The exhibition is divided into didactic sections that are light in touch: the close relationship between Picasso and Braque is informatively glanced upon, as is the use of color by a notoriously monochromatic movement. The introduction of collage is given significant space, and there are hints of the Constructivism that would follow in its wake. Picasso outnumbers Braque two-to-one in terms of the number of pieces on display, but the latter artist holds his own—testimony, at least in part, to their rigorous interdependence during Cubism's formative years. Turns out, Braque needed Picasso's flash as much as Picasso gained rigor from Braque's more tempered approach.

If Picasso and Braque were the pioneers of Cubism, Léger and Gris were two of its most accomplished practitioners, codifying stylistic innovation in the service of complete and utterly distinct worldviews. Léger's machine-based aesthetic is seen at its most elegant within the steely gradations of *Three Women* (1920), and its most muscular in *The Smoker* (1914) and *Houses Under the Trees* (1913), "tubist" masterworks that all but rollick off the wall. The gallery devoted exclusively to Gris is something special, if only because he's given short shrift in New York museums and, for that matter, the standard telling of art history. A classicist in temperament with a deft hand for pearlescent shifts of tone, Gris brought an exacting intelligence to Cubism that marks him as some-

thing more—much more—than a mere follower. Gris's use of collage carries with it greater wit than Braque ever managed and his palette is not only engagingly discordant, but more structurally sure than anything Léger and, especially, Picasso put into order. Thank Leonard Lauder for not stinting on this sly, sleek, and surprisingly eccentric figure. But thank him mostly for a bit of philanthropy that will continue to provide pleasure (and puzzlement) for generations to come.

—Mario Naves

"Wynn Bullock: Revelations." High Museum of Art, Atlanta June 14, 2014–January 18, 2015

Wynn Bullock (1902–1975) is highly approachable. He is immensely quotable, a self-effacing searcher with an appealing hint of the metaphysical. His images are eminently readable, filled with unapologetic reverence and undoubted technical prowess. As a purveyor of a certain kind of photographic vision, we can trust him implicitly. So why isn't he better known?

Born in Chicago and raised in southern California, Bullock traveled to Europe in the 1920s to study music. In Paris, he discovered the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists and the avant-garde photography of Man Ray and László Moholy-Nagy. Back in the United States, he studied photography at the Los Angeles Art Center and became known for his experimental techniques in bas-relief and solarization (a process in which a photograph is reversed in tone so that dark areas appear light and vice-versa). In 1948, Bullock met Edward Weston and was so impressed by Weston's work that he turned away from experimental photography and began making "straight" photographs.

Bullock's first solo exhibit in New York led to the selection of two of his prints—*Let There Be Light* (1954) and *Child in Forest* (1951)—by Alfred Stieglitz to be a part of "The Family of Man" exhibition. This popular show, which consisted of 503 images and traveled the world for eight years, gave Bullock international exposure and brought him to the attention of MOMA's Beaumont Newhall and Edward Steichen. Bullock's long and respected career also included studies in philosophy, writing, and lecturing. In 1975, Bullock joined Ansel Adams, Harry Callahan, Aaron Siskind, and Frederick Sommer to help found the University of Arizona's Center for Creative Photography.

Bullock's family has lovingly cared for his legacy, yet he has perhaps been overshadowed by Adams and Weston, whose ubiquitous nature studies have made them household names. This exhibition at the High Museum, which contains more than 100 images, some never before seen, is the product of close collaboration between Bullock's daughters and the High's photography curator Brett Abbott. The images on view present a comprehensive picture of the photographer's oeuvre, one that is impressively broad and deep.

Bullock's abstract images from the 1930s and 1940s are clearly influenced by Man Ray. Working as he was in southern California, Bullock's solarization photographs have a voluptuousness akin to the Hollywood glamour portraiture of George Hurrell. *Solarized Black Woman* (1940) is a slick, torqued, high-energy image so vibrant that you can almost hear the jazz that is putting this woman in motion.

By the 1950s, Bullock had begun investigating the body in nature, using his friends, his wife, and his two daughters as subjects. *Edna* (1956), an homage to Stieglitz's photographs of Georgia O'Keeffe, shows Bullock's wife's hands digging into the tender skin of her upper chest. Bullock became adept at masterful compositions distinguished by ingenious layering effects, some images with telescoping views and others in which the scene is peremptorily flattened. For example, in *Barbara Through Window* (1956) the depth of field is so compressed that it seems as if the framed image of Bullock's daughter has been artificially inserted into the surrounding plank wall. Bullock's sensibility for subtle optical illusions is brilliantly executed in *Barbara and Plants* (1955), where his daughter is seen from behind, arms over her head and partially hidden by a thin screen of wildflowers. Her wavy blond hair and skin are the same color as the wall she stands against and the effect is one of sand showering down on her from above. *Nude Behind Cobwebbed Window* (1955) is a delicate play of scale and suggestion: Behind the mullioned window is a vague but unmistakable

outline of a torso; spidery pines or clouds like those in a Japanese landscape clog the panes at the right and left.

It must be said that Bullock's image of children, many of which are his daughters in the nude, simply make one uneasy. *Child in Forest* (1951)—an immensely popular image when it traveled in Steichen's "Family of Man" exhibition—shows a nude Barbara lying face down in a field of clover. The curator reminds us that in Western art the nude was conceived as an intellectual exercise beyond eroticism. This gentle reminder succeeds in the case of Bullock's images of adult nudes. But with *Child in Forest* and *Lynne, Log, and Dolls* (1958), it is impossible to avoid thoughts of Charles Dodgson's controversial photographs of children. Bullock is admittedly closer to Dodgson than, say, Balthus or Hans Bellmer, but might his reputation, however undeservedly, be suffering because of these associations?

Bullock had a distinct ability to make the everyday seem alien and otherworldly. In *Boy Fishing* (1959), he turns an otherwise unremarkable scene into an interrogation of the boundary between representation and abstraction. A strip of flaky mud anchors a reflection of still water and vertical pilings of different thicknesses. On the pier, a boy stands slightly off center, the inverted V of his legs reflected below in the water. The dense black pilings merging into their reflections recall Robert Motherwell's *Elegy to the Spanish Republic* series or Clyfford Still's organic abstractions. Most intriguing is the quasi-solarization effect happening where the still water meets the dried mud. *Floating Logs* (1957) is also about water and wood, this time with an overwhelmingly surreal effect. Half-submerged logs float in undisturbed water so reflective that it looks like milk. How Bullock managed to render the water's uninflected surface while preserving the deeply ridged tree bark is a mystery. Trees—a painterly subject that has fascinated photographers since Gustave Le Gray first recorded the trees in the forest of Fontainebleau in the 1850s—figure widely in Bullock's work but seldom with such a powerful exploration of reversals and tonal shifts.

Indeed, Bullock is probably best known for his nature photographs. Repeatedly, he achieves incredible effects through scale or atmospherics. *Point Lobos Tide Pool* (1957) looks like an aerial shot of Peru's mysterious Nazca lines but is, rather, a galaxy of bacteria in stagnant water. When Bullock returned to photographing nature in the 1970s, his work took an anthropomorphic turn. *Burnt Wood* (1971) conjures a weatherworn profile of an ancient Egyptian god, while *Point Lobos Rock* (1973) finds a Klee-like head delineated in stone. Bullock even returned to photograms and other experiments such as rolling his Vaseline-coated face over a glass plate. The resulting *Experimental Self-Portrait* (1973) spans the whole genre of self-portraiture: Rembrandt's unflinching realism, Michelangelo's flayed skin as guilt and sin, and the self-loathing of Francis Bacon.

Bullock's "Color Light" abstractions from the 1960s demonstrate his lifelong interest not only in light and experimentation, but also his devotion to process. (The idea of process is also a subtext of his natural images, where he chronicles the passage of time, decay, and the world's constant state of change.) For these works, Bullock built a stand to hold a stack of evenly spaced glass plates and placed on them transparent materials like tinted glass, cellophane, or jars of honey. Photographed at close range using variable focus, the glass plates disappear, leaving dazzling images of mesmerizing color. As pleased as he was by the results, Bullock was frustrated by the limits of chromogenic color printing of the time and often resorted to projecting slides of the images on a wall. At the High Museum, these works are displayed as inkjet prints as well as screen projections. Given inkjet's somewhat unpredictable color fidelity over time, one wonders how Bullock would have viewed this installation.

"Revelations" includes an exceptional catalogue produced under the close supervision of the photographer's heirs. Its large square format is ideal for the images and the reproductions are consistently fine. It seems deceptively easy to get to know Wynn Bullock as an "explorer of space and light" (to quote the title of a Vermeer-like 1956 portrait of the photographer by Clarence John Laughlin). Here is a chance to renew the acquaintance or to meet this American master for the first time.

—Leann Davis Alspaugh

Music

New York chronicle

by Jay Nordlinger

Elza van den Heever is a young South African soprano—and one of triplets. That is an interesting datum from her bio. She made her Metropolitan Opera debut two seasons ago in *Maria Stuarda*, the Donizetti opera. She was not the title role: That was Joyce DiDonato, the great American mezzo. She was the other queen, Elizabeth, and she made an impression. Now she has made her New York recital debut, in Weill Recital Hall.

Her program was a throwback. It began with Baroque music, continued with German art songs, went to a French set, and closed with music personal to the singer. That's how it was with Leontyne Price and many other singers. But that sort of program is old-fashioned now. Administrators, critics, and academics want "themes." They want to teach some sort of musicological lesson. To me, at least, van den Heever's throwback was delightful. It was practically subversive.

She opened with two opera arias by Handel. Her singing was like her program: a throwback, practically subversive. This was big, opulent Handel (the kind that Price sang). It was politically or musicologically incorrect. It was pre-Emma Kirkby Handel. Van den Heever was somewhat fuzzy on a few high notes. She did not execute much of a trill. But her bold, unapologetic singing was to be appreciated.

From Handel, she went to Schumann: the great cycle *Frauenliebe und -leben*. Usually, this cycle is sung by a mezzo-soprano, not a soprano, and certainly not a soprano of van den Heever's type. It was gratifying to hear a big voice in a little recital hall. I would not have minded *more* voice, actually: One had the feeling that van den Heever was holding back.

After Schumann, she sang a Fauré set, and then, returning to German, a Brahms set. She was accompanied by Vlad Iftinca, a Romanian-born pianist (and capable). The singer's technique came and went. Many notes were impure—breathy or, again, fuzzy. But she almost always sang with a basic musicality. She also sang with honesty. In nearly everything she did, she was winning. To her credit, she did not handle her French songs with sugar tongs, a common error of singers. She gave them drama, when they deserved it.

Here is a little bias of mine. In lesson after lesson, and master class after master class, teachers say, "Show it on the face, dear"—put the meaning of the words or music on your face. I believe this can be overdone. And I believe that Elza van den Heever overdid it. But, again, this is a little bias of mine.

Before she sang her last group of songs, van den Heever said they were "dear to my heart," these songs. They were songs from her native land: South African songs, i.e., art songs in Afrikaans. This was unknown territory, at least for me. Van den Heever sang songs by Stephanus Le Roux Marais, John K. Pescod, and Petrus Johannes Lemmer. Pescod wrote "Oktobermaand," or "October Month." Speaking from the stage, van den Heever gave her audience a nice reminder: October, in South Africa, is springtime. Her final song was by Lemmer, "My siel is siek van heimwee" ("My

soul is sick with nostalgia"), a gentle and affecting anthem.

In my view, some of these songs are a little dumb. But van den Heever sang them with such appreciation, they were not dumb at all. She was embracing her own literature, in this foreign hall, and offering something new under the sun (new to us foreigners).

Before she left, she sang one more South African song, as an encore. This was by Pieter de Villiers, known as "the composer who made the country sing." Van den Heever sang this song as though touching a deep personal chord. And, as she sang it, I had a funny thought. When I was growing up, Afrikaans speakers were portrayed as beasts, persecuting innocent people. A lot of them were indeed such persecutors. But they were human beings, the Afrikaans speakers. And we heard a few remnants from their culture.

Above, I mentioned Handel—and Carnegie Hall hosted a performance of his opera *Alcina*. In any of Handel's more than forty operas, you will find fabulous and hit arias. *Alcina* has—to mention just three—"Verdi prati," "Tornami a vagheggiar," and "Ah, mio cor!" (True, every opera in the Italian language has an aria that begins, "Ah, mio cor!") This performance of *Alcina* was a concert performance, as befits Carnegie Hall, and it was led by Harry Bicket, the Baroque specialist. The orchestra was the English Concert, the band founded in the early 1970s by, among others, Trevor Pinnock, that splendid musician.

Arriving at Carnegie Hall, I saw the small collection of chairs on the stage. I sighed a bit and thought, "Are we in for four hours of 'scratch, scratch, hoot, hoot'?" That is how Itzhak Perlman once described the sound of period bands. Some thirty years ago, he said, "I'm tired of turning on the radio and hearing scratch, scratch, hoot, hoot." Also, how would Bicket do? Would he conduct more like a Baroque specialist or more like a musician?

He performed well, as it turned out (conducting from the harpsichord). There was not too much wheat germ in this Handel. It helped to have the orchestra on a stage, I think, rather than in a pit: The sound was ampler. Tempos, as a rule, were brisk but not offensively so. "Verdi prati" was surprisingly and blessedly unrushed. The principal cello, Joseph Crouch, played with burnished tone, sensible style, and excellent intonation. Sure, there was some hooting from a recorder or two—but into every period performance, some scratching and hooting must fall.

Operas are meant to be staged, but if you want to do a concert performance, you might as well do it of an *opera seria*, with aria after aria, solo turn after solo turn. The singers on this afternoon did some acting nonetheless. They also did some overacting, some hamming, in my judgment. What's more, I find it odd to see people act and read from a score at the same time. Shouldn't it be one or the other?

There were two main mezzos onstage—Joyce DiDonato, singing Alcina, and Alice Coote, singing Ruggiero—but there was a third one, too, with not insignificant work to do. She was Christine Rice, singing Bradamante. She was low and smoky and effective. There were other fine singers as well, and I hate to skip them, but let me get to the main event . . .

As they took turns singing arias, it seemed a bit of a sing-off between DiDonato and Coote. The latter was magnificent, of course. She is one of the best mezzos, and best singers, before the public today. She demonstrated control, strength, subtlety, and other important qualities. She scarcely put a foot wrong. And yet, DiDonato is . . . what? Historic? A friend of mine (a soprano) said during the first intermission, "I feel sorry for the other singers." I did too, in a way—but perhaps they could appreciate the history being made.

Like other critics, I have run out of words to describe and praise DiDonato. I am even tired of writing the sentence I have just written. But I will make a few points about her. Often, she sings more like an instrumentalist than like a singer. Nathan Milstein, the great violinist, might have played Handel's notes the way DiDonato sang them. But, with the voice, there is additional humanity. DiDonato's intonation was like a laser. Shrewdly, she turned vibrato on and off (as she "played" her "original instrument"). She employed any number

of colors. Sometimes, this performance of *Alcina*, from others, was a little monochromatic. When DiDonato opened her mouth, it was like a peacock unfurling its feathers. Aria or recitative was of no importance to DiDonato: She sang her best either way. Finally, this lyric mezzo can unleash a little power on you. Lyric though she is, she is not a powder-puff.

Typically, we overrate the past and underrate the present. Or else we are cautious about the present (reluctant to go out on a limb with our judgments). I have been privileged to hear many good and great singers since the mid-1970s. I doubt I have heard a better one than this present-day Kansan.

With the New York Philharmonic, Alan Gilbert on the podium, Yefim Bronfman played Bartók's Piano Concerto No. 3. People call it the composer's "Mozart concerto." Bronfman is a top-notch Mozartean, a top-notch Bartókian, and a top-notch everything else. I had been looking forward to this performance for weeks, if not months. Every once in a while, though, Bronfman will lay an egg on you. Usually the egg comes in the form of dullness. And so it was on this Tuesday night.

In the first movement, Bronfman was stiff, careful, logical—and dull. In the slow movement, that beautiful, ineffable thing, he was plodding, vertical, and square. His fingers came down on the notes like unthinking sausages. The final movement had no fire, no thrill, no impishness, no jazz, no charm, no spark, no electricity. It was so much pianistic clock-punching. What in the world?

If Homer nods, so can the great Bronfman. Maybe I expect too much from him. Maybe I expect him to be a paragon every time. But if this is my expectation, Bronfman, in his greatness, has conditioned it. Did Hofmann and Godowsky and Lhévinne nod too? They no doubt did. Frankly, this Tuesday-night performance of the Bartók Third was not terrible-terrible. It was just not Bronfmanesque (or Bartókian).

Christopher Rouse is now in his third season as composer-in-residence of the Philharmonic. That means we have heard a lot of Rouse out of the orchestra. This has its upside and downside. The upside is that the public gains a broad familiarity with the work of a contemporary composer. The downside is that other composers may be shut out. There are only so many slots for new music. And should you fill so many of them with one composer, when other guys are begging for a hearing? At any rate, Rouse is a worthy focus. For one thing, as I keep saying, he loves music, and writes as though he wants others to love, or at least like, what he has done. That cannot be said for every composer, far from it.

In a program conducted by Leonard Slatkin, the Philharmonic played Rouse's Flute Concerto, with principal flute Robert Langevin serving as soloist. This is not a new work, but rather an old one: composed in 1993. According to the evening's program notes, this flute concerto is the most frequently played of Rouse's concertos. Is that on the order of celebrating the tallest building in Wichita, Kansas, as William F. Buckley Jr. once said in a different context?

The composer himself spoke of this concerto in a program note. "Although both of my parents' families immigrated to America well before the Revolutionary War, I nonetheless still feel a deep ancestral tug of recognition whenever I am exposed to the arts and traditions of the British Isles, particularly those of Celtic origin." This is an Irish concerto, written by that *Mayflower* American. I wonder whether Sir James Galway—"Jimmy"—has played it. The first and last movements are labeled "Amhrán," Gaelic for "Song." Rouse says that these songs bear some relation to the one-named Irish pop star Enya. The third of the five movements is an elegy ("Elegia"). Rouse wrote it in reaction to the murder of a child, which was in the news at the time, and haunted him.

In the first movement—the first "Amhrán"—the flute does some flitting around, as flutes do. Otherwise the music is sad and wistful. It could accompany some Irish movie, as the camera pans land or sea. The second movement is marked "Alla marcia," and it provides a nice contrast. It is smart and snappy. The third movement is that elegy, and if you have been told about the event that occasioned it, you think about that event. And if you have not been told? Well, music

without words means nothing, unless you insert "Happy Birthday" or a national anthem or something like that. The elegy is the centerpiece of the concerto—literally and otherwise—and it is obviously important to the composer. I hate to knock it. But it felt long to me. It felt like a compositional mistake. It seemed to halt the concerto and knock it off balance. The fourth movement, a scherzo, jolts us back to life. It is another flit-fest, and the flute does some *demonic* flitting, actually. The last movement, and second "Amhrán," is a hymn of peace.

I am a Rouse fan. And we all have our sense of time, I suppose. I would be loath to tell him to "tighten that baby up." But, in this one hearing of mine, I found that the concerto lost steam after the second movement, unable to get its groove back. Perhaps I need additional hearings.

Langevin is a very fine flutist—able both to flit and to sing. Curiously, he read the score, all through. Why some concerto soloists do this, I'm not sure. Slatkin conducted with vigor, precision, and grace. And let me say that the flute has grown on me over the years. I think that boys as a class have a bias against the flute: It's a girly instrument. Yet it is amazingly versatile and beautiful, an indispensable part of the musical palette. And even when I was a kid, I knew that William Kincaid (the Philadelphia Orchestra's principal) was extraordinary. If you will forgive me—and those who knew his playing will know exactly what I mean—he played like a man.

Into Carnegie Hall came none other than the Philadelphia Orchestra—the Fabulous Philadelphians, as we used to know them. They would play Mahler's Symphony No. 2, "Resurrection," conducted by their new music director, Yannick Nézet-Séguin. I was worried. Would the conductor be callow? The Mahler Second is a long, sublime, profound symphony, requiring real musical maturity. Nézet-Séguin can be a wound-up little conductor, effective in some presto movement but unsatisfying elsewhere. I remember a Verdi Requiem from him: good in the fast parts—the parts that sort of play themselves, with limited interpretive choices—and maddening in the slower parts, requiring taste and judgment.

When he took the stage, his orchestra applauded him. That is highly unusual, in my experience. He began the symphony very well: tight and furious. A good beginning counts for a lot, as does a good ending. Would Nézet-Séguin last the long haul? He indulged in rubato too early, I thought—too much too soon. The long haul demands some straightness in early stages. Also, Nézet-Séguin was very liberal with portamento—which was Mahlerian, and nice. Some conductors are reluctant to go through with this. Still, the music threatened to dissolve into soup, under Nézet-Séguin's baton. The first movement ended with admirable, necessary strictness.

The next movement, Andante moderato, ought to be the definition of clockwork grace. On this occasion, it was a touch heavy, and the conductor's little ritards were annoying. There was some sloppiness in the orchestra—botched entrances and the like. And the concluding pizzicato was horrible. On the whole, though, this movement was rather good. And the third movement was superb—idiomatic, flavorful, and stirring.

Singing the "Urlicht" was Sarah Connolly, an English mezzo, a descendant, if you will, of Dame Janet Baker. She has some of those qualities. And she sang well—with dignity and self-possession. Singing really well, later on, was the soprano, Angela Meade. She was rich, easy, natural, and big. This music can stand a big voice. The soprano part in the Mahler Second is often a nothing—the mezzo is the vocal star—but it was very much present and accounted for on this night. The Westminster Symphonic Choir, a fixture on the New York music scene, performed surpassingly. Truly, I have never heard them better (in all these years).

As for Nézet-Séguin, he luxuriated in the music, but not grossly. I could pick at his conducting of the last movement. He did not quite convey Mahler's hushed, quivering intensity. And there was too much stop-and-start for me in the final pages. I like more of a flow. But Nézet-Séguin was very, very good—vital and compelling—making me think, "Now I know why the orchestra was applauding him." I applauded too, long and loud.

The media

Strategic thinking

by James Bowman

"Dana Milbank," says the columnist's capsule biography in the Washington Post, "writes about political theater in the nation's capital." Ha ha. He's just kidding. He actually writes about politics and (especially) politicians, but he treats them as if they were theater. Because they kind of are. Get the joke? I'm not quite sure Mr. Milbank himself does. Just look at the mock bafflement in the opening paragraphs of his column on the morning after the Republican victory in the mid-term elections.

> During political campaigns, candidates usually tell voters what they would do if elected. But Sen. Mitch McConnell had a different idea. "This is not the time to lay out an agenda," the Kentucky Republican told reporters four days before Election Day. A week or so before that, the man who would be the next Senate majority leader provided more details of his theory. "It's never a good idea to tell the other side what the first play is going to be." No, but it might be a good idea to tell the voters what you're up to.

No, it mightn't. Political campaigns by either party have become highly skilled at *not* telling voters what they would do if elected. Mr. Milbank ought to know better than anyone why Senator McConnell was reluctant to publicize the Republican playbook in advance of the game—a metaphor that itself suggests the reason. It is that the game—or, if you prefer, the theatrics—of the election is now all there is. The triumph of the media culture of scandal and mandatory outrage, a culture which has enjoyed victory after victory over the humble customs, prejudices and little hypocrisies of our traditional politics in the forty years since Watergate, has seen to that. As Mr. Milbank's *Washington Post* colleague Chris Cillizza put it that same morning, "McConnell tries not to make himself the issue in races because he knows he's a mostly behind-the-scenes guy whose strength is in strategy not speeches."

Just so. Strategy. The media themselves no longer have any idea of politics apart from strategy, and yet they go on expecting or pretending to expect of it something like the Lincoln–Douglas or Nixon–Kennedy debates. Why then, pray tell, is the only thing they remember about the latter Nixon's five o'clock shadow and sweaty upper lip? They know very well, or they surely ought to know, that criticizing the other side for lacking in substance or positive proposals is itself a purely strategic move. "Because Republicans didn't run on an agenda other than antipathy toward all things Obama," Mr. Milbank continues,

> they created a policy vacuum — and it's about to be filled by a swirl of competing, and contradictory, proposals. Republicans find themselves with neither a consensus program nor a clear hierarchy among congressional leaders, the half-dozen aspiring presidential candidates in Congress and the various governors and former officeholders who also think they should be the party's 2016 standard-bearer. Republicans have set themselves up for chaos, if not outright fratricide.

The confidence with which he pronounces this rather petulant-sounding prediction sug-

gests that he is pretending to expect Republican chaos and fratricide as much for his own benefit as for that of his readers. No doubt with the same idea in mind, *The New York Times* editorialized on the morning after the Democratic defeat: "Negativity Wins the Senate." As if there were any other candidate in the race! As if a victory for Democrats touting the GOP "war on women" or "obstructionism"—or, in many cases, the pretense of their own opposition to the President—would not have been at least as negative as the Republicans' targeting of Mr. Obama.

As if, too, Dana Milbank doesn't know that what he derides as the "bromides" and "platitudes" of the Republican program are now all that either party has got to offer. And where a proposed measure might seem to be *not* a bromide or a platitude, as in the case of raising the legal minimum wage, all the rhetorical energies of the proposer are expended to make it one. Earlier this year, for example, *The New York Times* purported to prove editorially that new research had shown there was no economic downside to raising the minimum wage and that, therefore, raising it could not even be considered controversial anymore. We didn't have to choose after all! People in low-paid jobs could now have more money without any cost to anyone—*and* there would be just as many jobs as there were before. As in the case of the Democrats' dangerously large budget deficits, which the Republicans eventually gave up attacking, some genius had once again been found to prove that conservative common sense was mere superstition.

You will no doubt recognize the tactic from one that has long been employed by the global warmists. Because, it is said, no serious scientist has any doubts about anthropogenic "climate change," we are all meant to be shamed into supporting an economically ruinous program of reduction in fossil fuel consumption. Except that—guess what?—there is naturally another gaggle of economic masterminds standing ready to assure us that it wouldn't be ruinous at all! As Secretary of State Kerry told graduates at Boston College last May, totally retooling and adapting our economy to use renewable energy would mean only that "we put millions of people to work . . . we make life healthier because we have less particulates in the air and cleaner air and more health; we give ourselves greater security through greater energy independence—that's the downside."

Sure it is. The point in these and similar cases is obviously to extract the content from political debate itself, leaving nothing for reasonable people to differ about and, as an inevitable corollary, showing that differences could only be unreasonable, stupid, bigoted, or self-interested. From the beginning of the Obama presidency, the good news was meant to be that we didn't have to choose anymore, now that we had chosen him. Just as, in his first inaugural address, the President explicitly rejected as false "the choice between our safety and our ideals," now (as he proudly announced in confirming Mr. Kerry's good news) "we don't have to choose between the health of our economy and the health of our children." Funny, isn't it, how all the hard choices that politics were once thought to involve suddenly seem to have disappeared? It's surprising that Mr. Milbank appears not to have noticed it—especially as he certainly has noticed that, if there is no longer to be any doubt that we can simply vote ourselves or legislate ourselves or borrow ourselves into being richer and better and happier, no one but a knave or a fool could possibly refuse to do so.

This is how it has happened that the only permissible point of contention in any election comes with the need to decide who are the good people and who are the bad—and why the left are stunned into incredulity when they find themselves playing, however briefly and tentatively, the role of bad guy. For there must have been among the Republican election day voters a number who felt just a bit ashamed of themselves for turning away from the party of benevolence and compassion. All the media's decades of good work in casting their political drama this way cannot have been undone overnight. Perhaps, too, some vague belief in *The New York Times*'s editorial page assurance that the experts had yet again discredited common sense conservatism lay behind the success on election night of ballot

measures, even in states that voted Republican, to raise the minimum wage—a success that proved to be one of the few bright spots on election night for the progressive left.

Another was that, apparently, the Republicans had been victorious only by virtue of purging the worst of their own bad guys. Both the *Times* and the *Post* led their coverage with long, how-did-this-happen? stories on the strategy that Mr. McConnell's team had allegedly used to win. They could be summed up in the Gray Lady's headline: "Republicans' First Step Was to Handle Extremists in Party." The *Post*'s article was a bit less tendentious and declined to describe the dreary list of losing Republicans in previous campaigns—Akin, Mourdock, Angle, O'Donnell—as "extremists." But the point of its nearly 5000 words was also and equally strategic, at least insofar as it seconded the media (and Democratic) conventional wisdom that social conservatism—now virtually synonymous with "extremism" to large segments of the media and the public—cannot win elections.

If there was a silver lining to the gloom that enveloped the Left, it lay in this presumptive acquiescence by those the left and right had agreed to call "establishment" Republicans in the recently established Democratic and media rulings as to the political views permissible to decency or respectability—or at least electability. Thus Thomas B. Edsall in the *Times* considered it a significant development of the election that "the Republican establishment, at least for the moment, has wrested control back from the Tea Party wing. This will make it more difficult for Democrats to portray their opponents as dangerous extremists." He was echoed by John B. Judis in *The New Republic*, who found that "by moving to the center, the Republicans neutralized Democratic efforts to paint them as extremists." With what mixed feelings must the defeated Democrats have consoled themselves in the thought that Republicans had won only by becoming more Democratic!

Perhaps some such idea was in the mind of President Obama himself at his post-election press conference. There, the election behind him, he might have been expected to release at least a bit of the genuineness and humanity that had obviously had to be incarcerated for the duration, if only to show that he was as susceptible to remorse and self-doubt as the next guy. Not at all, as it turned out. He couldn't even bring himself to demonstrate a nodding acquaintance with the bare reality of defeat. "Obviously, Republicans had a good night," he said. "And they deserve credit for running good campaigns. Beyond that, I'll leave it to all of you and the professional pundits to pick through yesterday's results."

For himself, he resolutely refused to see those results as a repudiation of himself and his administration. "What stands out to me, though, is that the American people sent a message, one that they've sent for several elections now." Wait a minute, Mr. President! So when people voted for Democrats they were sending the same message as when they voted for Republicans? Yes! Hard as it might have been to believe, the message was that "they expect the people they elect to work as hard as they do. They expect us to focus on their ambitions and not ours. They want us to get the job done. All of us in both parties have a responsibility to address that sentiment." Talk about bromides and platitudes! Even Dana Milbank professed a certain amazement:

> "I hear you," President Obama said to the voters who gave Democrats an electoral drubbing in Tuesday's midterm elections. But their message went in one presidential ear and out the other. The Republican victory was a political earthquake, giving the opposition party control of the Senate, expanding its House majority to a level not seen in generations and burying Democratic gubernatorial candidates. Yet when Obama fielded questions for an hour Wednesday afternoon, he spoke as if Tuesday had been but a minor irritation. He announced no changes in staff or policy, acknowledged no fault or error and expressed no contrition or regret. Though he had called Democrats' 2010 losses a "shellacking," he declined even to label Tuesday's results.

Theater critic as he professes himself to be, Mr. Milbank must have had in mind here some such idea as that, in declining to acknowledge

in defeat any fault of his own, any mistake, or even the defeat itself, the President had failed to play a predetermined role as the political drama (still) demanded it should be played. He even cited George W. Bush in 2006 as his example of someone who had successfully learned the part he was supposed to play in a similar situation. The other rules may have changed, but a President is still supposed to show at least a touch of grace and humility in acknowledging such a defeat, and this had proven to be beyond Mr. Obama.

Yet why should we be surprised? It must be hard to imagine what grace in defeat even looks like if you see yourself as a man of destiny, and you have lost to the kind of people whom it has been your life's work to portray as merely stupid, brutish, nasty, bigoted, or hateful. How do you retreat from that characterization without annihilating yourself? Or admitting it was all just an act in the first place?

No, I'm inclined to let Mr. Obama off the hook on this one. The part he has chosen to play in our American extravaganza does not admit of grace. But what excuse have the hard-faced party men of *The New York Times* editorial page?

> There were demands that he take personal responsibility for the Democratic losses, or exhibit public contrition, or describe exactly where he plans to give in to Republican demands. He was right to ignore all of that, and instead he got directly to heart of Tuesday's message from the public: "What's most important to the American people right now, the resounding message not just of this election, but basically the last several is: Get stuff done," he said. . . . Mr. Obama was justified in sticking with what he called "the principles that we're fighting for," which got him elected twice: creating job opportunity by expanding the economy, the top issue on the minds of most voters. There is no need to backtrack on goals like a higher minimum wage or expanded health insurance when most voters say they want those things. . . . Voters said they wanted the two parties to stop bickering and work harder, not erase the progress made in the last six years.

Leaving aside the commonsense observation that voting Republican must betoken a desire for more bickering in Washington, not less, didn't the voters also, at a minimum, call into question the certainty of *The New York Times* and other die-hard Obama-ites that the last six years did in fact represent progress? Weren't they implicitly suggesting just the grain or scruple of a doubt that the erstwhile good guys were "on the right side of history" after all? Ah, but that, surely, is the one thing that the believers in political good guys and bad guys, "settled science" and no more hard choices can never, never admit to.

Verse chronicle

The glory days

by William Logan

Louise Glück's compelling, slightly creepy new book, *Faithful and Virtuous Night*, is stuffed with morbid fantasies, cracked allegories, offbeat fairy tales, and parables with no name.[1] The speaker, who might be called Glück/not-Glück (if the world of these tales is unstable, so is character), reveals everything while revealing nothing—the poems are a raw look at identity constructed on the fly, which is, after all, not very distant from the way ordinary criminals live. If we trust Freud, we're all ordinary criminals.

Glück's poems display, more than any poet since Plath and Lowell, the mental pressure of invention—they're landmines waiting to be stepped on. The breathless concision and pinch-penny vocabulary that mark them as forms—her brand, in contemporary jargon—have at times proven more burden than blessing. The language is still nervous as a razor (I can't think of any poet as good who takes less pleasure in words), but Glück has found a way to remove the trammels of speech. The slightly woozy voice seems impelled to speak, or perhaps not to stop.

> You're stepping on your father, my mother said,
> and indeed I was standing exactly in the center
> of a bed of grass, mown so neatly it could
> have been
> my father's grave, although there was no stone
> saying so.
>
> You're stepping on your father, she repeated,
> louder this time, which began to be strange to me,
> since she was dead herself; even the doctor had
> admitted it.

Freudian allegory? Haunted confession? Glück has rejected the authority most poets now assume as their birthright—that is, to claim the authentic by mining nothing but their lives. These new poems may still derive, in distorted fashion, from the almanac of Glück's experience, in the same sense that Homer may have filched something he heard for the *Iliad*; but mostly they're in the voice of an elderly man, a painter from Cornwall. One or two seem spoken by Glück (including the most moving, about the death of her mother), the rest by not-Glück, excluding some surreal capriccios plucked from Mark Strand's waistcoat.

Glück has long taken Greek and Biblical myths as her private playground; though these have often given her life grotesque and manic proportion, in her best work the trivial becomes the spooky embodiment of myth. The speaker has an assistant, a Bartleby to open and answer letters, but he begins to have doubts:

> Master, he said (which was his name for me),
> I have become useless to you; you must turn
> me out.
> And I saw that he had packed his bags
> and was prepared to go, though it was night
> and the snow was falling. My heart went out
> to him.
> Well, I said, if you cannot perform these few
> duties,

1 *Faithful and Virtuous Night*, Louise Glück; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 71 pages, $23.

what can you do? And he pointed to his eyes,
which were full of tears. I can weep, he said.
Then you must weep for me, I told him,
as Christ wept for mankind.

There may be a touch of irony at the last, but Glück sometimes miscalculates, sometimes crosses the border from melancholy to farce. (She sees the problem: the "whole exchange seemed both deeply fraudulent/ and profoundly true.") The parable of the talents in Matthew shadows the scene, however, as perhaps does Frost's spiritually depressing poem "Snow."

In their subjects, the poems embrace the off-kilter tilt of the bizarre: a fortune teller's reading, a vision of the kingdom of death, a visit from dead parents, a fable about a wooden ballerina, a Kafkaesque machine registering the progress toward death (it's just a heart monitor, but this is Glück, after all). One piece is called "Parable," another "A Work of Fiction." In the most disturbing poem, a girl and her grandmother ignore a man sleeping on a stairway, apparently dead. The girl returns:

She knelt below me, chanting a prayer I recognized as the Hebrew prayer for the dead. Sir, she whispered, my grandmother tells me you are not dead, but I thought perhaps this would soothe you in your terrors, and I will not be here to sing it at the right time.

When you hear this again, she said, perhaps the words will be less intimidating, if you remember how you first heard them, in the voice of a little girl.

Glück's career, the long view shows, has been one string of private fictions worked and reworked, invented, killed off. (I'd compare her to Ovid, that pathologist of myth; but she's more one of his doomed characters.) I want to laugh at the hubris, but she's at last found a way to cast off the burdens of confession. Lowell played fast and loose with the facts—he had the Flaubertian itch—but Glück seems happy to remake her life wholesale. The character at the center of these tales, this not-Glück, was raised by an aunt after losing his parents and baby sister in a car wreck. Born a girl, he becomes a boy, then a man—or so he says. None of this falls from Glück's life—yet fiction can be truer than truth, the facts defective but the psychology pure. In the strangest way, these poems seem posthumous.

Joshua Mehigan is a throwback to the Eisenhower days of wary pentameter, Quaker morals, and acidic wryness that never goes too far. *Accepting the Disaster*, his second book, often treats Spoon River properties with a modern air—factory, town square, cemetery (with any luck the dead would start yakking at each other).[2] There's a dash of Bishop, a heavy specific of Larkin, and great chunks of Auden—so many poems remind you of other poets, there ought to be a law, or an index.

Nothing has changed. They have a welcome sign,
a hill with cows and a white house on top,
a mall and grocery store where people shop,
a diner where some people go to dine.

The lack of traction in that diner's dining diners is the point—such towns seem immutable, but the poem's final line ("Nothing here ever changes, till it does") can't quite escape the glassy dullness of the details. The lines are meant to be devastating, but they're just pallid criticism of American Panglossiana, whose textbook has always been *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*.

Mehigan's ideas are too often weighed down by the meagerness of the means and the short payoff of the ends.

The town had a smokestack.
It had a church spire.
The church was prettier,
but the smokestack was higher.

It was a lone ruined column,
a single snuffed taper,
a field gun fired at heaven,
a tube making vapor.

The poem goes on in this vein for sixty lines or more, describing the smokestack and the smoke at various times in various weathers, here and there very wittily ("when it was resur-

2 *Accepting the Disaster*, by Joshua Mehigan; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 82 pages, $23.

rected,/ the sky turned black, and then white,/ as if a new pope were elected"); but the social commentary is more politic than political, and the metaphorical frenzy wears out long before the end. The tone seems borrowed, charm included, from Bishop's "The Burglar of Babylon"; yet the whole doesn't come to much, and it's not clear if it was ever meant to.

Mehigan has a quiet command of form and an intelligence never quite tapped by his designs—it's like watching a Chevy V8 dragging a horse cart. Auden's intellect was always knocking at the edges of form, giving no quarter; and decades ago James Fenton found a heady combination in Audenesque stanzas and high-octane invention. Mehigan's influences have done him no favors except to spoil the reader for anything less.

Where Auden's Everyman seemed a knowing and peculiar case, Mehigan loves the Everyman of Everytown. "No one is special. We grow old. We die," one poem begins, in a hum-ho or ho-hum sort of way; and the various wrestlers with mortality who follow—a devotee of plastic surgery, a gorgeous dancer grown old in a sad toupee, a prince who aspired to be a god and was murdered by his guard—are presented in such bland, passive terms (more diorama than drama), it's hard for any feeling to escape, whether despair or schadenfreude.

At worst, the verse is set on automatic, nattering on without much to say and very few ways of saying it. In the title poem, an attack on the complacency of our modern dystopia, or one almost like ours, the donnish tone (among many nods to Auden: "we, ignoring our leaders' slick assurances/ and the timid findings of our so-called experts") sinks into smug and fatty rhetoric:

> And our small planet braved the ravages
> of constant gamma-ray disturbances,
> and it turned counterclockwise. Some of us
> blamed aliens. And by small slippages
> the moon was drifting.
> The cosmos scattered. Its far provinces
> were laden with prophetic stillnesses.

If Astronomy 101 were any duller, we'd still believe in the heavens of Ptolemy. (I'll forgive the counterclockwise, though that depends on whether you're looking down on the North Pole or up at the South.) The poems are never bad enough to be interestingly bad, but never good enough to be good.

Sometimes you can soft-pedal your ironies until they're scarcely ironies any more. The longest poem in the book is in the voice of a man who has gone off his meds. It collapses, at a length not much short of *The Waste Land*, into a goofy madhouse scene, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* done by refugees from *Alice in Wonderland* ("'Don't take me!' cried the clozapine./ 'Don't take me!' cried the cure"). In the end, too many of Mehigan's poems, however adroit, however well mannered, however responsibly responsible, offer less to the cookie-cutter suburbs and bankrupt cities than a minor fifties poet like Phyllis McGinley, who knew her limitations and gamely settled for them.

In her charming but annoying new book, Matthea Harvey makes her bid to become the Jeff Koons of contemporary poetry.[3] *If the Tabloids Are True What Are You?* has been interleaved with glossy photos of her schlock art—tiny dolls and doll furniture frozen in ice cubes; tea cups overflowing with cotton batting; paper-punch chad printed with the word *yes*; silhouettes of mermaids whose lower bodies are a pair of scissors, or a revolver, or a Swiss Army knife; and embroidery of unlikely machines—say, a stone piano. The art's just goofy camp, like a tractor-trailer of carny prizes struck by a tornado. As for the poems, the reader can expect a sequence on mermaids; an arty performance piece made by whiting out all but a few words from some pages of Ray Bradbury's "R Is for Rocket"; a tale about women imprisoned in a glass factory, who fashion the living glass-girl who frees them; and an overlong sequence on the frustrations of the maverick Italian inventor Antonio Meucci, who built a precursor of the telephone.

This giddy mishmash of science fiction, Hans Christian Andersen, freak-show silhouettes, and pop obsessions (yes, there's an Elvis poem) is hard to categorize and often hard to bear, unless you like your whimsy in lethal

3 *If the Tabloids Are True What Are You?*, by Matthea Harvey; Graywolf, 154 pages, $25 (paper).

doses. The influence of Anne Carson and the second wave of New York School poets (Ron Padgett, Ted Berrigan, Tom Clark, et al.)—call it Dada with a vengeance—makes the book self-satisfied and unpredictable, *faux naïf* but slickly self-conscious. Take "The Straightforward Mermaid," she of the Swiss Army-knife tail:

> The Straightforward Mermaid starts every sentence with "Look . . ." This comes from being raised in a sea full of hooks. She wants to get points 1, 2 and 3 across, doesn't want to disappear like a river into the ocean. When she is feeling despairing, she goes to eddies at the mouth of the river and tries to comb the water apart with her fingers. The Straightforward Mermaid has already said to five sailors, "Look, I don't think this is going to work," before sinking like a sullen stone. She's supposed to teach Rock Impersonation to the younger mermaids, but every beach field trip devolves into them trying to find shells to match their tail scales.

This could go on forever, and almost seems to. The wincing cuteness is one thing, the heavy-handed message quite another. The rambling never quite gets to the point, though the points are everywhere. The Homemade Mermaid, "top half pimply teenager, bottom half tuna," was created by a modern Dr. Frankenstein; the Inside Out Mermaid has a lover, but "secretly loves that he can't touch her here or here"; the Objectified Mermaid, between semi-nude photo shoots (seaweed bra, glycerine), works in a bar where she offers customers Tankside Mertinis, letting them feel up her tail. If you don't understand the symbolism—the billboard notices about women, conformity, torture, self-torture, and of course sex—it's because you've been hit on the head too often with a hammer. That Harvey may at times be lampooning modern proprieties doesn't make the poems much better.

Poetry has a fairly short history of comic improv and few gilt-edged examples (Christopher Smart must be the prime early adopter), because the promise of woolgathering lunacy fades long before irritation at the endless blabbery. (Still, the Tankside Mertini may be the best drink ever invented by a poet.) Harvey has a sprightly, devious imagination; and her occasional show of wit makes me wish she'd find better grounds for her talent: for a morning pick-me-up, her Tired Mermaid "bites an electric eel, and the chill in her molars isn't much, but it's something"; her Deadbeat Mermaid "floats on her back and watches the giant sky, stuck on the same stupid cloud channel all day long." In such lines I'm seduced by Harvey's oddball temper—you can go a long way in contemporary poetry without finding anything like her. A girl looks at a thermometer: "the sun has inched up/ a few degrees and yes, Monday has a fever." Meanwhile, out in the ocean: "Once, a large square mammal with a wide mouth/ of black and white teeth floated up out of a shipwreck./ It's true, we swam away. We'd never seen a piano before."

It's too quirky by half, I admit. Much of the new surreal is written for an audience with an endless appetite for kooky observation. (They never applaud. They smirk.) There's hardly a poem here that doesn't outlast its means—the good news is that you never know where Harvey will go, the bad that you don't care. I can imagine future projects: a documentary about death threats made by scissors, a sitcom called "My Favorite Mermaid," a talk show with a puppet host and antique dolls for guests, and a rock band whose lead singer is a talking Fender amp.

Edward Hirsch's long, heartbroken elegy for his son reveals undercurrents of rage and guilt more painful than anything actually said.[4] A beautiful adopted baby grows into a nightmare child, impulsive, hapless, destructive, subject to furies beyond any cure but exhaustion. Like dutiful members of the upper-middle class, his parents make appointments with doctors, therapists, educational consultants and receive, like dutiful members of the upper-middle class, contradictory diagnoses—depending on the expert, the child suffered from Tourette's, pervasive developmental disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, oppositional-defiant disorder, ADHD, or half-a-dozen other things. The

4 *Gabriel*, by Edward Hirsch; Alfred A. Knopf, 83 pages, $26.95.

parents are packed off with an alphabet of prescriptions for the troubled: the lines "Adderall Depakote Ritalin// Strattera Abilify Concerta" do no more than begin the list.

The loss of a child is the worst fate a parent can imagine, and no parent who loses a child is left unscarred—the bond between them is so profound the parent suffers a grief nearly unbearable. Very few young lives, alas, are riveting enough to sustain 2,300 lines of lament—the dramas of children (where they're not the dramas of adults in disguise) are likely to dissolve, like the death of Little Nell, into tears for the crowd. The hurtling unpunctuated lines in *Gabriel* are as ungoverned as the lost boy, rickety with sentiment, racing on until they collapse:

> Perfect fingers perfect toes
> Shiny skin blue soulful eyes
> Deeply set in a perfectly shaped head
>
> He was a trumpet of laughter
> And tears who did not sleep
> Through the night even once
>
> O little swimmer in the deeps
> Raise up your arms
> Ring out your lungs
>
> O wailing messenger
> O baleful full-bodied crier
> Of the abandoned and the chosen

For all the incidental detail thrown into the poem, the story remains unhappily familiar. Hirsch has never possessed the gift for turning stray particulars to deeper purpose (a talent Lowell had in spades); and too frequently he lingers on anecdotes that, however beguiling, seem like outtakes from some sappy Hollywood biopic:

> There were *Welcome Gabriel* signs in the rafters
> The classicists drank gallons of red wine
> And hoisted him up like a trophy
>
> Gelsa the Italian nanny overdressed him
> And took him all over Trastevere he was known
> At the butcher shops the dry cleaners the coffee bars
> He had become the unofficial mayor
> Of the neighborhood waving from his stroller
> At shopkeepers who waved and shouted *Ciao Gabriele*

The great elegies for the young in English poetry have been relatively brief: "Lycidas," which heads the list, is less than two hundred lines, while *In Memoriam*, though long, is a set of discrete lyrics. Hirsch invokes the shades of other poets who have written of their dead children—the *Pearl*-poet, Ben Jonson, Mallarmé—but they offer a severe comparison to the plodding and tedious verse here.

At twenty-two Gabriel Hirsch died of a heart attack after taking the rave-scene drug GHB, his body lying unidentified while his parents desperately searched for him in the aftermath of Hurricane Irene. The raw facts are more dramatic than anything Hirsch can say about this wasted life, wasted not because his parents were ogres, not because he hung out with the wrong crowd, not because of anything but the bad luck of chemistry or wiring that nothing could fix. Whatever intensity the poet might have brought to this lament has been lost in the prosaic dullness of the writing, in tired metaphors, helter-skelter narrative, deadening anaphora, and odd lapses of syntax ("The funeral director opened the coffin/ And there he was alone/ From the waist up// I peered down into his face"). The curious reserve that now and then rescues Hirsch from outright sentiment only makes the outbursts of breast-beating unconvincing and embarrassing. There can be no absolution after a crime that has only victims.

Gabriel obeys the conventions of grief without following the poet into the darkness of despair and guilt and self-loathing only hinted at. The most striking passages lie unwritten—the poet casually mentions that in time he left the boy's care largely to his wife, who later divorced him, and admits that he often neglected his son to write poetry. The reader suffers mild whiplash when the wife is replaced without warning by a new girlfriend—the collapse of the marriage in argument and recrimination is alluded to only vaguely, but like the poet's shallow recognition of guilt this suggests the devastating testament the elegy might have been. There

was no easy way to write this book. *Gabriel*'s failure is as depressing as the life of the lost boy who could not be saved.

For forty years Paul Muldoon's poems have come not in a trickle but a flood. Inventive, slapdash, wildly and maddeningly conceived, they're politely freakish, yet especially in the past decade amusing rather than shocking, rarely cutthroat in craft, and so overstuffed with extranea, with the garbage and recycled plastic of culture, they resemble Mr. Boffin's mountains of dust.

There's another Muldoon, one increasingly hard to find (poets often contain multitudes even when wholly themselves—Whitman was many, but we recollect him as one). That would be the fresh-eared poet who was a close student of Heaney, the poet as bog-knowledgeable as an army of peat cutters, who could turn a forgotten poem by Southey into a philosophical epic. Like Newton, that Muldoon picked up seashells until he had a passing acquaintance with the universe.

The later Muldoon, the Muldoon of *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing*, is a monstrous industry, his nose everywhere and his eyes nowhere.[5] Given the kinkiest and most promiscuous gallimaufry of facts, he can turn them into, well, into a Paul Muldoon™ poem (there's a lot of chewing involved—factoids go in, poems come out).

> It was in Eglish that my father kept the shop
> jam-packed with Inglis loaves, butter,
> Fray Bentos corned beef, Omo, Daz, Beechams
> Powders,
> Andrews liver salts, Halls cough drops,
>
> where I wheezed longingly from my goose-
> downed truckle
> at a Paris bun's sugared top.
> A tiny bell rang sweetly. The word on the tip
> of my tongue was "honeysuckle."

Beyond the nostalgic litany of Irish grocery stock (Eglish is a tiny village in County Tyrone), the truffle-hunting dialect and linguistic arcana (a truckle-bed can be rolled under a taller bed when not in use), the ramifying details take in—like the maw of the Calydonian Boar—Ovid on the Black Sea, the Jahangiri Mahal, Herbert Hoover, Robert Frost, Meleager, Fabergé, surgery on wounded hens, and other matters fowl or fair (commissioned to write on a painting in the National Gallery of Ireland, Muldoon chose a trivial genre scene of chickens).

The poem's partly about the Irish childhood that haunts him still; partly about the rhythms of adult life, the relation of father and son; partly about roosters; and partly about whatever stumbled into Muldoon's head along the way—but there are so many digressions and distractions and culs-de-sac, so many Ogden Nash–full rhymes and Tilt-A-Whirl slants, so many lame jokes and deaf puns ("My new razor/ had me on edge"), it's hard to separate the message from the static. (I know, I know, the message *is* the static.) When Muldoon says, "The only thought that crossed// my mind . . . ," it's hard to believe him—his mind is like the Indianapolis 500. Here and elsewhere there's a dodgy fact or two. Is the temperature of chickens really "106 centrigade," beyond the boiling point? Are the best baseball bats "turned from hibiscus"? There may be something serious beneath all the madcappery, antic as an explosion of feathers—but you're so busy scrabbling your way out you can't stop to think.

There's rarely any sense of necessity to Muldoon's poems now, any intention buried deep in reason. He can compact five millennia of Irish history into a stanza or two; but at the end you scarcely recall the subject, the poem's so rich in particulars and starved in substance. (It's not too much icing and too little cake—there *is* no cake.) The showpiece (Muldoon's poems are all showpieces—that's the problem) is a sonnet sequence in which *Ben Hur* is deported to Ireland, the hero reinvented as Ben Hourihane, the English forced to fill in for the Romans, with Bloody Sunday, Billy the Kid, gerrymandering, and the Mescaleros dragged in for good measure.

> The dog is tense. The dog is tense the day
> Ben Hourihane

5 *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing*, by Paul Muldoon; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 119 pages, $24.

falls fuel of the new Roman turbine,
Little Miss Sally hisself, tense enough to set
off a chain
of events that will see Ben mine

warehouse after warehouse of schlock
and link him via a Roman warship
to a hell-for-leather chariot race at Antioch.
Sooner or later Messala will need a lot more
than a double hip

replacement while Ben will barely chafe
at the bit. That's right, Messala, an *amputation*
saw!
The doctor is cocking an ear to your chest's
tumble-de-drum
like a man trying to open a safe.

Thomas Pynchon would be jealous.

One Thousand Things Worth Knowing is a roller coaster—not a Frank Gehry–like steel whirligig, but one of the old wooden jobs, rickety as Grandmother's rocker, as likely to pitch you into midair as bring you home and dry. There are so many things I like about Muldoon—all that chutzpah, and sprezzatura, and panache (he's a whole lexicon of naturalized nouns)—it's disappointing that after an hour of such devilish abandon, such endless reruns of the Paul Muldoon Show, I never want to read the poems again.

John Berryman would have turned one hundred this year. Had he lived to that great age, he'd probably still be spouting on the great and sundry with the old bravura self-confidence, meanwhile smoking like a chimney. He came from a generation not doomed or damned, but acting the part—Dylan Thomas dead at thirty-nine (alcohol and pneumonia), Anne Sexton at forty-five (suicide), Randall Jarrell at fifty-one (suicide or accident), Theodore Roethke at fifty-five (heart attack), Berryman at fifty-seven (suicide), Robert Lowell at sixty (heart attack). Only Elizabeth Bishop lived to a reasonable sixty-eight. The great moderns—Pound, Eliot, Frost, Stevens, Moore, and Williams—all lived past seventy-five, Pound and Frost surviving until near ninety.

It's not clear in what sense *The Heart Is Strange* can be subtitled *New Selected Poems*.[6] Berryman's publishers have marked the centenary by reprinting *Berryman's Sonnets*, the complete *Dream Songs*, and rather redundantly *77 Dream Songs*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1965. The *New Selected* is left to choose from what remains—readers new to Berryman will find none of his most important work. The subtitle is doltish, but you can't blame the editor for not calling the volume *No Dream Songs!: The Dregs of John Berryman*.

Berryman began as a high-flying student (Columbia, Cambridge), cocksure of his gifts, writing like a man whose hot-and-heavy affair with the Muse had left him with not a clue how to write a poem.

Our superstitions barnacle our eyes
To the tide, the coming good; or has it come?—
Insufficient upon the beaches of the world
To drown that complex and that bestial drum.
* * *
Glade grove & ghyll of antique childhood glide
Off; from our grown grief, weathers that appal,
The massive sorrow of the mental hospital,
Friends & our good friends hide.
* * *
Scotch in his oxter, my Retarded One
Blows in before the midnight; freezing slush
Stamps off, off. Worse of years! . . no matter,
begone.

Yeats, Auden, and Hopkins left their thumbprints all over Berryman's apprentice work, which was earnest and dull when not congealed. The poems are full of special effects filched from his betters and the rhetorical sludge of the day. Apart from one good war poem, "The Moon and the Night and the Men," Berryman had little to show for the decades of poetic drudgery before he published *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* in 1953.

Anne Bradstreet's bland, doughy verse proved to seventeenth-century England that something resembling poetry could be written

6 *The Heart Is Strange: New Selected Poems*, by John Berryman, edited by Daniel Swift; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 179 pages, $26.

in the New World. Berryman revived her in an arch idiom of his own invention, full of crotchets and fidgets and preposterous inversions, yet ragged with the inner life of an educated woman stuck in the wilderness of Massachusetts:

> —it is Spring's New England. Pussy willows
> wedge
> up in the wet. Milky crestings, fringed
> yellow, in heaven, eyed
> by the melting hand-in-hand or mere
> desirers single, heavy-footed, rapt,
> make surge poor human hearts. Venus is trapt—
> the hefty pike shifts, sheer—
> in Orion blazing.

The poem was a tour de force of mannerism, rising above the dismal work of the period. What Berryman learned, and forgot, and had to learn again was that his poems in propria persona were so busy proving he was the smartest guy in the room, they were insufferable.

Berryman was an obsessive. Once he settled into the Dream Songs, using a stanza adapted from *Bradstreet*, he found it difficult to quit (Lowell suffered a similar addiction to unrhymed sonnets). The Songs are terribly uneven, flashes of brilliance interrupting long stretches of crabbed and sometimes impenetrable maundering. Berryman had more to confess than most confessional poets, but it was still garden-variety sinning—mania here, furtive affairs there, drunken bouts abounding. They would have made a decent comic novel.

The Dream Songs, however, found in the character of Henry the way to distance Berryman's know-it-all, peacockish tone—his *Doppelgänger* gave him the right of detachment. All the surface contrivance—maddening inversions, whippy rhymes, smart-alec remarks and minstrelsy and baby talk—became the manifest sign of psychological torment and wrestled intelligence below. The self-indulgence and bitter self-loathing benefited from this bifurcated vision—it was easier to forgive Berryman when, as they say, he wasn't himself.

None of that can be found in this selection. What is offered piecemeal, after the greenhorn work and *Bradstreet*, are the weak later books: *Love & Fame* (1970), *Delusions, Etc.* (1972), and the posthumous *Henry's Fate & Other Poems* (1977). There are long autobiographical poems that couldn't be duller—they read like sub-*Life Studies* sketches (or, given Berryman's major mode, skits). In the better of the dreary sequences in praise of the Lord, the poet quarrels with God while protesting his obsequious submissiveness. The editor, Daniel Swift, picks and chooses among this late work, not always well—having omitted the embarrassing political poems, he includes a silly children's rhyme and a flatfooted elegy for John F. Kennedy while ignoring the witty, scathing "Washington in Love" and "Beethoven Triumphant." The posthumous hooverings include few of the almost fifty post-*Dream Songs* dream songs that gave Henry new life:

> Many bore uncomplaining their lives pained
> so long and in such weather. Henry complained.
> All a Venetian June
> the sun raged down on stone & water.
> Gondoliers slept
> thro' midday on to four. Man was inept
> against the sun, and soon
>
> humid Henry took boat up the Grand Canal
> where the breeze & the palaces refreshed him, pal,
> palaces bold & demure.

This has all the terrible humor, aggression, and acceleration of Berryman's best work, where he was a sheep in wolf's clothing.

In his long, cautious introduction, the editor sidles past Berryman's chronic brutishness and spasmodic genius with some public-relations spin. "Taught briefly at the Iowa Writers' Workshop" is code for "fired after being arrested and fined for public intoxication and disorderly conduct" (he shat on his landlord's porch). Berryman is ripe for a full volume in the Library of America, containing all the poems—bad, brilliant, and indifferent—as well as the shrewd and knowing criticism (Jarrell the only rival among his peers), not neglecting the idiosyncratic book on Stephen Crane. If space remains, perhaps the flaccid slog of a novel or the almost forgotten short-stories; but even more welcome would be a great gout of the unpublished letters.

Books

A nation in retreat

by Keith Windschuttle

Ever since the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, a number of leading intellectuals, from both liberal and conservative points on the political spectrum, have been predicting the decline of the United States. The London School of Economics philosopher John Gray responded to the GFC by declaring: "The era of American global leadership is over." The Yale historian Paul Kennedy revived his doctrine of "imperial overstretch" to argue that American military spending and the consequent increase in federal debt would soon bankrupt the country.

The conservative Harvard economic historian Niall Ferguson was the most pessimistic of all. In a 2010 paper "Empires on the Edge of Chaos: The Nasty Fiscal Arithmetic of Imperial Decline," Ferguson said America's fate would be sealed very quickly. Like other great powers of history, it would not decline gradually, but would suddenly "fall over a cliff." The tipping point would come when the costs of servicing government debt exceeded the defense budget, which, he said, would occur some time within the next five years, that is, by 2015.

With that ominous year now almost upon us, the debate has recently attracted two formidable conservative contrarians. In his book *The Myth of America's Decline*, Joseph Joffe bases his case largely on economic comparisons: the United States remains much more economically viable than its detractors imagine, and the rival Chinese model, on which most critics base their vision of the future, is already facing diminishing rates of growth. Suddenly, Joffe writes, China is looking more and more like Japan, yesterday's champion. Joffe's book is an invaluable contribution to our understanding of global economic prospects.

Even more indispensible is the most recent contestant in the field. It focuses more on American foreign policy in a world which, if not yet fallen over a cliff, has certainly tumbled into a vale of turmoil. The *Wall Street Journal* columnist Bret Stephens titles his book *America in Retreat: The New Isolationism and the Coming Global Disorder*.[1]

By defining America in retreat rather than in decline, Stephens shifts the debate in an important direction. The concept of a nation's decline implies historical inevitability, something so deeply embedded in the scheme of things that, despite our best efforts, it is bound to happen. This version of Greek tragedy has strong appeal in the book market, but Stephens makes a powerful case that "retreat" is the right word for the real world. Retreats are man-made. Sometimes they signal defeat and surrender, but they can also permit regrouping and resurgence. Stephens writes:

> America is *not* in decline. It is in retreat. Nations in retreat, as the United States was after World War I, can still be on the rise. Nations in decline, as Russia is today, can still be on the march. Decline is the product of broad civilizational forces—demography, culture, ideologies, attitudes towards authority, attitudes towards work—that are often beyond the grasp of ordinary political

1 *America in Retreat: The New Isolationism and the Coming Global Disorder*, by Bret Stephens; Sentinel, 263 pages, $27.95.

> action. Retreat, by contrast, is often nothing more than a political choice. One president can make it; another president could reverse it. It is still within America's reach to make different choices.

This is not to say Stephens regards the global disorder of his subtitle as an easy fix. Indeed, the problems are now more difficult than at any time since the Cold War. The inventory is daunting: the Russian annexation of Crimea and invasion of Ukraine; the aggressive maritime claims of China against Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines; the unraveling of political order in the Arab world and the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria; the revival of theocratic Islam in Iran and Turkey; the progress to nuclear weapons by Iran and their international marketing by North Korea, prompting more Middle East states to consider their own nuclear options.

The mounting belligerence coincides with a widening perception of America's reluctance to act as protector of last resort. Indeed, the perpetrators appear to believe that not only is the Obama administration's reticence fixed in the President's character and ideology, but that the United States is actually unable to do anything because of its weaknesses, both financially and militarily.

Their perceptions of America's retreat, Stephens argues, are well founded. It is the central fact of the present decade and is far from confined to the Middle East. In November 2013, he observes, Secretary of State John Kerry went so far as to renounce the mainstay of American foreign policy in America's own hemisphere for the past 190 years. "The era of the Monroe Doctrine is over," Kerry told the Organization of American States, and "that's not a bad thing."

Instead, President Obama prefers "nation-building at home." Stephens says this is a revealing phrase. No American president before him has chosen to argue that a choice must be made between foreign and domestic policy. Since the Second World War, every other president has pursued America's international interests while strengthening the economy, building infrastructure, and launching major domestic initiatives, from the interstate highways to civil rights and welfare reform. Obama's ideal for foreign policy, however, is to have less of it. He told an interviewer in 2013: "I am probably more mindful than most of not only our incredible strengths and capabilities, but also our limitations."

In security terms, Stephens observes that American domestic policy is actually in retreat at home too. "In the name of civil liberties we are taking apart the post-9/11 domestic security architecture—warrantless wiretaps, telephony metadata collection, police surveillance programs—brick by brick." Meanwhile, the U.S. Army is returning to the size it was in June 1940, the date, Stephens reminds us, when Nazi Germany conquered France.

The ideological basis of this shift, argues Stephens, is Obama's conviction that the containment most needed in the twenty-first century is not of the United States' authoritarian adversaries China, Russia, or Iran. Instead it is containment of the United States itself, containment "of its military power and its democratic zeal; of its presence and commitments abroad; of its global preeminence." He quotes Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel in February 2014, announcing a new round of budget cuts: "We are entering an era where American dominance of the seas, in the skies, and in space can no longer be taken for granted."

On the ground, the resulting tactic is that of the "light footprint." Stephens argues that this has been a core idea of the retreat strategy since 2009. Obama believes that, in its recent history, the United States has been treading too heavily in the world and that staying out of other people's business is a better policy, even when American strategic interests are at stake. Instead, the United States should use minimalist means to achieve limited goals. The Defense Department's 2012 Strategic Defense Guidance document stresses: "Whenever possible, we will develop innovative, low-cost, and small footprint approaches to achieve our security objectives." Hence the emphasis under Obama on the use of drones and special forces to make strikes against terrorists, and on the training and partnerships with friendly countries, defined by the administration as "leading from behind."

While the light footprint tactic has had some success—Stephens cites the case of the war against Colombian drug cartels where the United States. helped shore up the arms and resolve of the Co-

lombian military—elsewhere it has been a disaster. It was the operating policy in the American occupation of Iraq after the fall of Baghdad in 2003, when it was thought cheaper and safer for American troops to avoid being a constant, visible presence on Iraqi streets. The result was to accelerate the country's descent into chaos. The subsequent, and successful, surge, Stephens observes, was the opposite of light footprint. The gains of the surge in 2007–8, however, were eclipsed once Obama announced America's withdrawal from Iraq would take effect. According to a recent Rand Corporation report, between 2010 and 2013 the number of jihadist groups in the Middle East rose by 58 percent, the number of jihadist fighters doubled to 100,000, and the number of Al Qaeda attacks around the world jumped from 392 to 1,000.

Light footprint, says Stephens, is an approach politically well-suited to a country wearied by, and wary of, lengthy nation-building exercises, and fiscally well-suited to a period of growing deficits and shrinking military budgets. Beneath its shadow, Obama has largely given up on any efforts to foster liberalism and democracy abroad. "Light footprint, it turns out, isn't just a military concept," argues Stephens. "It's also a retreat from ordinary moral judgment."

The upshot of all this "leading from behind" has been the spread of its influence far beyond the White House's Democratic coterie. A new foreign policy divide has emerged in the United States, cutting across traditional partisan and ideological divides. "It's no longer a story of (mostly) Republican hawks versus (mostly) Democratic doves," Stephens writes.

> Now it's an argument between neoisolationists and internationalists: between those who think the United States is badly overextended in the world and needs to be doing a lot less of everything—both for its own and the rest of the world's good—and those who believe in *Pax Americana*, a world in which the economic, diplomatic, and military might of the United States provides the global buffer between civilization and barbarism.

The result is the emergence of "the new isolationism" of Stephens's subtitle. The era of American internationalism since the Second World War, he argues, is giving way, with amazing swiftness, to a period of American indifference. If it prevails, this isolationism means the present retreat will be long-term and perhaps permanent. The most concerning feature of the isolationist shift is that it is bipartisan.

"An increasing number of Tea Party and libertarian-leaning Republicans like Senator Rand Paul," Stephens observes, "are espousing their own version of George McGovern's 'Come Home, America' speech." He says Barack Obama wants to retreat from America's global commitments in order to build bigger government, while many Republicans want to reduce those commitments for the sake of smaller government.

> On the left, isolationism is the logical policy prescription for people whose instincts lean towards pacifism (war never solves anything), cultural relativism (who are we to judge?) and original American sin (it's all the fault of our own past misbehavior). On the right, isolationism suits people who believe that culture determines everything (we can't save others from themselves), and the law of unintended consequences (whatever we do will backfire).

Even more significant is the fact that majority public opinion has now shifted to the isolationist side. Stephens quotes a survey by the Pew Research Center in 2013, which found that for the first time since it began polling the question in 1964, a majority of Americans—52 percent—agreed with the view that the United States "should mind its own business internationally." Another Pew survey in 2011 found only 39 percent of Republicans agreed that "it is best to remain active in world affairs," down from 58 percent in 2004.

Consistent with his scenario of retreat rather than decline, however, Stephens believes it is both necessary and possible to turn around the prevailing strategic policy framework and the ideologies that underpin it. This might happen by Americans coming to realize the benefits they gain from the world they could lose. He says Americans have lived in an orderly world for so long they have become broadly oblivious to how good that world has been for them. Under the *Pax Americana* that has prevailed in most non-communist countries since the end of the Second World War, the increase

in prosperity and progress is unmatched by any other period of history. Stephens is an impressive singer of its praises.

> *Pax Americana* is a world in which English is the default language of business, diplomacy, tourism, and technology, in which markets are global, trade is increasingly free, and networks increasingly global; in which values of openness and tolerance are, when not the norm, often the aspiration. It is a world in which the possibility of another country imposing its will upon us remains, for the time being, remote. The wars we fight might be long wars, but they are small: they do not require conscription or rationing. They don't even require a tax increase.

He points out that America's long commitment to Western security paid fruitful dividends in the globalization of democracy and wealth, from South Korea and Taiwan to Poland and the Baltic states. American military power and financial largesse underwrote peace between Egypt and Israel and helped ensure European integration. Germany and Japan were converted from militarism to pacificism. The world economy flourished. GDP, just $11 trillion in 1980, doubled by the time the Cold War ended a decade later. By 2012 it reached $72 trillion. Americans were not shortchanged by the spread of wealth: U.S. per capita GDP, about $12,000 in 1980, rose to $46,000 by 2012.

None of this came cost-free, of course. It required constant vigilance and a readiness to shed blood and treasure in its defense. Stephens is just as impressive in defending the cost. He points to the emergence of ambitious and aggressive creeds in Europe and Asia in the 1930s, when the world lacked a great power to put them down, and the costs they eventually imposed in the 1940s, after Americans realized their own way of life was at stake. If nothing changes, he argues, Americans will again find themselves in a world very much like the 1930s, another decade in which economic turmoil, war-weariness, Western self-doubt, American self-involvement, and the rise of ambitious dictatorships combined to produce the catastrophe of World War II.

Analogies to the 1930s, or to any other period of history have their limitations, Stephens acknowledges, and there is no law of history that dictates America's current retreat will have the same results. Then again, he notes, no law dictates that it will not. If the United States stops policing the world and simply acquiesces in whatever comes next, the challenges to global order now before our eyes will only multiply.

> A world in which the leading liberal-democratic nation does not assume its role as world policeman will become a world in which dictatorships contend, or unite, to fill the breach. Americans seeking a return to an isolationist garden of Eden—alone and undisturbed in the world, knowing neither good nor evil—will soon find themselves living within shooting range of global pandemonium.

Eliot in full

T. S. Eliot, edited by Jewel Spears Brooker & Ronald Schuchard
The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 1: Apprentice Years, 1905–1918.
The Johns Hopkins University Press, 896 pages, $180 (online subscription)

T. S. Eliot, edited by Anthony Cuda & Ronald Schuchard
The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, Volume 2: The Perfect Critic, 1919–1926.
The Johns Hopkins University Press, 992 pages, $180 (online subscription)

reviewed by Denis Donoghue

T. S. Eliot died on January 4, 1965. His widow, Valerie Eliot, spent the later years of her life—she died on November 9, 2012—establishing her husband's archive. The first fruit of this work was the publication in 1971 of her edition of the original drafts of "The Waste Land." This was followed by the publication in 1988 of the first volume of *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, which she edited. A revised and much extended version of that volume appeared in 2011, with Hugh Haughton as co-editor. The fifth volume of the letters is about to be published. Meanwhile, in 2006, Mrs. Eliot commissioned *The Complete*

Prose of T. S. Eliot. That was thought of at first as a scholarly print edition, of which Johns Hopkins University Press would do an electronic edition afterwards. But it was decided by the publishers, for reasons not known to me, that they would first do an online edition in eight volumes, and, later on, a limited print edition based on those. The eight separate online volumes will then be integrated into a fully searchable web platform. The first two volumes of the eight have now been published online. Two more volumes will be out next year, the remaining four in 2016–2017. Students and faculty in every subscribing university, college, and library will have immediate access to the volumes as they appear, which they can download on their iPads or other gadgets. The editors inform us that the edition will include more than one hundred items—essays, reviews, lectures, broadcasts—hitherto unpublished, and more than two hundred not recorded in Donald Gallup's standard bibliography of Eliot.

The first volume runs from January 1905 to November 1918: It contains some juvenilia, including a schoolboy essay scolding Kipling for sundry defects, but mainly it starts off with the papers Eliot wrote as a graduate student in the Department of Philosophy at Harvard and later at Merton College, Oxford. These are brilliant performances in the application of a destructive intelligence to problems of definition and terminology. The most formidable of them is "The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual," which he wrote for a meeting of Josiah Royce's seminar in Logic on December 9, 1913. Eliot was already on the way to becoming a great critic, relentless in diagnosing errors and contradictions in William James and other masters. His own position in philosophy was equivocal; he mostly found himself among the relativists, but not with much confidence, as in "The Relativity of the Moral Judgment." It was inevitable that he would soon talk himself out of philosophy, though he stayed in it long enough to complete, in a somewhat casual fashion, his doctoral dissertation on F. H. Bradley, in 1916. In June 1914, he arrived in Europe, officially to spend a year on a fellowship at Merton, but in truth to see something of Europe, before the War put a stop to his travels. On January 6, 1915 he wrote to Norbert Wiener, not yet the inventor of cybernetics, but for now a mathematician vacationing in philosophy at Cambridge:

> For *me*, as for Santayana, philosophy is chiefly literary criticism and conversation about life. . . . The only reason why relativism does not do away with philosophy altogether, after all, is that there is no such thing to abolish! There is art, and there is science.

He didn't return to Harvard to defend his dissertation, so the degree was not conferred. He had no desire to spend his life teaching philosophy, so the loss of the doctoral degree was not a grief to him. The dissertation, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley*, was not published until 1964. Eliot never withdrew his admiration, or at least his respect, for Bradley, but in later years he lost much of his interest in his philosophy and quoted him mainly as a stylist, a master of English prose. You may read the dissertation at your leisure in Vol. 1.

The second volume goes from April 1919 to December 1926. Eliot was now a formidable poet, author of *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), *Poems* (1919), *Ara Vos Prec* (1920), and "The Waste Land" (October 1922). He was also a notable man of letters, a major literary and cultural journalist in London. Bertrand Russell helped him to get a start in reviewing for the *International Journal of Ethics* and *The Monist*. But he made his own mark in *The New Statesman*, *The Athenaeum*, *Art & Letters*, *The Egoist*, and especially *The Times Literary Supplement*, where the editor Bruce Richmond encouraged him to write full pages on whatever aroused his interest. Mainly he wrote on the English metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century and the minor Elizabethan dramatists. But he also took up an agenda of several good causes, starting with the need to establish what "modern" meant in the phrase "modern literature." He did this not by propounding a theory of modernity that his favorite writers fulfilled, but by repeating, again and again, the names of those artists he deemed worthy to be called modern. Primarily, Ezra Pound. Then Joyce,

Wyndham Lewis, and T. E. Hulme. Frazer in anthropology. Bradley of course in philosophy. Marianne Moore in poetry, yes indeed. Remy de Gourmont and Julien Benda in literary criticism. In ballet, Massine. In music, Stravinsky for *The Rite of Spring*. Yeats, not yet, despite Pound's endorsement of him: he hadn't yet written *The Tower*. Thomas Hardy, never: "a faint infection of decadence." Conrad, the early novels. D. H. Lawrence: Eliot couldn't quite decide, though he was leaning toward "nay." Shaw, not at all—"Shaw's mind is a free and easy mind: every idea, no matter how irrelevant, is welcome." Meredith, no. Gilbert Murray, the enemy, think of the damage his translations of Greek tragedy continue to do, "Greek without tears." And behind all the modernists, the lonely figure of Henry James, "the most intelligent man of his generation."

Another item in Eliot's agenda: to invoke the sentiment if not the conviction of Europe as a cultural entity, "the European idea, the idea of a common culture of Western Europe." When he founded *The Criterion* and edited it from 1922 to 1939, Eliot did the best he could to forward this idea, but he soon learned that it was a burden to persuade his favorite Europeans to join him. He published a few essays that could be called European—it was good to have Valéry Larbaud praising Joyce—but he could not summon Europe to rise to his occasions, and the coming War rendered his dream null. It was hard enough to keep his Londoners—John Middleton Murry and Herbert Read among the boisterous lot—under control. If he had any energy left over, he had a third project, the possibility of creating a poetic drama, more specifically a verse drama:

> The Elizabethan drama was aimed at a public which wanted *entertainment* of a crude sort, but would *stand* a good deal of poetry; our problem should be to take a form of entertainment, and subject it to the process which would leave it a form of art. Perhaps the music-hall comedian is the best material . . .

—this last an idea he mentioned again in his essay on Marie Lloyd (1923): it can be seen, if only as a mirage, in Eliot's first attempt at a verse play, the unfinished "Sweeney Agonistes" (1932).

Eliot's critical method, the only one he recommended, was "to be very intelligent." He practiced that method boldly, and usually finished off his paragraphs with an aphoristic flourish. Some of these have a deplorable tendency to lodge in one's memory: "Yet I am not sure, after reading modern theology, that the pale Galilean has conquered." "We cannot return to sleep and call it order." "The suspicion is in our breast that Mr. Whibley might admire George Meredith." "The book is written in an artless style, which ends by pleasing." "I do not mean to suggest that all discontent is divine, or that all self-righteousness is loathsome." It is not a surprise that, during his first years in London, he was so prolific that he could not stop to verify his quotations or to give scholarly references. This makes a problem for the editors of these two volumes, who have had to pursue his allusions through several languages: Greek, Latin, Italian, German, and French. It is their practice to leave the errors untouched in Eliot's texts, but to correct them in the notes. The volumes are most helpfully annotated. The only occasion on which I feel that the editors have somehow missed the point is when Eliot makes the cryptic remark: "The trial of Oscar Wilde led to the constitution of the Irish Free State." I'm still puzzled. If Eliot meant that the evidences of immorality that came out in the trial impelled the leaders of the Irish Free State to draft a morally stringent constitution in 1922, he was wrong: that Constitution was not at all oppressive. It was Eamon de Valera's Constitution of 1937 that introduced contentious sentences about the privileged position of the Roman Catholic Church, the prohibition of divorce, and other domestic observances. But apart from that opacity, I find that the editors have given me a belated education in the liberal arts. For instance, I am glad to know that Eliot was being merely cheeky in attributing to Santayana the statement that "the only philosophy Shakespeare had was expressed in the statement that Duncan is in his grave." Santayana never said that.

Eliot selected from these early essays and reviews enough of them to make slim volumes of his criticism, *The Sacred Wood* (1920), *Homage to John Dryden* (1924), *For Lancelot Andrewes* (1928), and *Selected Essays* (1932). He might well have chosen, but he didn't, "The Borderline of Prose," "Reflections on *Vers Libre*," "*Ulysses*, Order and Myth," "Donne's Sermons," "A Brief Introduction to the Method of Paul Valéry," and his reviews of *The Education of Henry Adams* and Yeats's *The Cutting of an Agate*. Some good essays were rescued for later books, notably an essay on Sir John Davies (1926) for *On Poetry and Poets* (1957), "Ezra Pound: His Metric and Poetry" (1917) and "Reflections on '*Vers Libre*'" (1917) for *To Criticize the Critic* (1965), this latter already chosen by John Hayward for his *T. S. Eliot: Selected Prose* (1953). But *The Sacred Wood*, Eliot's choice of his essays written in 1919 and 1920, was the book to buy. F. R. Leavis bought it and read it thereafter three times a year, sharp pencil in hand.

It is a new experience to come upon the famous essays in the midst of occasional pieces which none of us, except the editors of the two volumes, can have read before. The now-notorious phrases—"dissociation of sensibility," "objective correlative," *Hamlet* "is most certainly an artistic failure," and more besides— rest on the page as if they had no intention of cutting a dash in the world or causing tempers to rise in the seminar room. It is hard to believe that "Andrew Marvell" and "The Metaphysical Poets," not to speak of the great essay on Dante, were written as if in a short day's work or between one domestic tribulation and the next. Not that they have gone unchallenged. The poet Geoffrey Hill, in a passage I gasped to read in his *Alienated Majesty* a year or two ago, said that Eliot, having written in "The Waste Land," "'On Margate Sands./ I can connect/ Nothing with nothing.'" subsequently became, in the lecture halls of Harvard, London, Chicago, Swansea, and Leeds, "increasingly able to connect everything with everything." The *Complete Prose* will present all the evidence, more than we have now, and we will be able to decide whether Hill's sentence is a joke, a jibe, or a vast implicative censure.

Awaking the theologian

Philip F. Gura, editor
Jonathan Edwards:
Writings from the Great Awakening.
Library of America, 801 pages, $40

reviewed by Marc M. Arkin

In the winter of 1734, a remote backwater of the British Empire suddenly found itself at the center of God's great plan for redemption. As the good news made its way through the trans-Atlantic evangelical grapevine, all Protestantism trained its gaze on Northampton, Massachusetts—a stockaded frontier town of roughly 1,200 souls, nestled on the edge of Indian territory in the distant reaches of the Connecticut River Valley—where a religious awakening had ignited and then spread to the neighboring towns and villages, an event as wondrous as it was inexplicable. For delighted English ministers, Northampton's experience was a sign of "how easy it will be for our blessed Lord to make a full accomplishment of all his predictions concerning his kingdom, and to spread his dominion from sea to sea, through all the nations of the earth."

For the previous sixty years, Northampton's townspeople had rejoiced in the ministry of Solomon Stoddard, popularly known as the "Pope of the Connecticut River Valley." Under his guidance, they had already experienced "five seasons" of heightened religious sensibility. When the great man died in 1729, his grandson and assistant, Jonathan Edwards, took over the town pulpit in his own right. A 1720 Yale graduate, Edwards had already distinguished himself for his intelligence and for his commitment to orthodox Calvinism and experiential Christianity. Before his tragic death at the age of fifty-five from a botched smallpox vaccination, he would compose the works that have earned him the reputation as one of the foremost theologians America has produced.

At first, Edwards found his flock "very insensible of the things of religion"; among the young people, "licentiousness for some years greatly pre-

vailed . . . there were many of them very much addicted to nightwalking, and frequenting the tavern, and lewd practices." But by 1733, he thought he noticed a change. In late 1734, in the midst of a closely reasoned sermon series on justification by faith alone, the response began to accelerate: "religion was with all sorts the great concern, and the world was a thing only by the by." The work continued through the spring and summer of 1735 and, as Edwards wrote to the Reverend Benjamin Colman of Boston, "the town seemed to be full of the presence of God; it never was so full of Love, nor so full of Joy, nor so full of distress as it lately has been." Edwards came to the only possible conclusion: the revival was a work of the Holy Spirit and a vindication of the orthodox Calvinist doctrine he preached.

News of these remarkable religious stirrings quickly spread up the Connecticut River as far as Northfield, and south as far as New Haven and Stratford in Connecticut. Churches throughout the region enjoyed their own seasons of quickening. But, even as Edwards readied his letter to Colman, he entered a grim postscript. On Sabbath morning, June 1, 1735, Edwards's uncle, a wealthy merchant named Joseph Hawley, slit his throat in the throes of spiritual despair. For Edwards, this apparently marked the end of the awakening. In the ensuing months, "Satan seemed to be more let loose, and raged in a dreadful manner." As Edwards grimly recorded, throughout the summer, "multitudes" of ordinary people—people "that seemed to be under no melancholy, some pious persons that had no special darkness, or doubts about the goodness of their state"—found themselves confronted by the temptation to cut their own throats "as if somebody had spoke to 'em, 'Cut your own throat, now is good opportunity: *now, NOW*!'"

Underlying this so-called "frontier revival" was a long tradition of concentration on the "conversion experience" in New England religious life. It was born from Calvinism's emphasis on the absolute sovereignty of God, its bedrock belief that the salvation of fallen humanity comes solely through faith, and its conviction that saving faith is a completely unmerited gift of God's grace. From the early days in Boston, Congregational churches began restricting the Lord's Supper—and full church membership—to those who had received that gift of saving faith and could recount their own personal experience of the workings of grace within their souls. Thus, as part of their pastoral duties, New England's clergy developed what amounted to an empirical science of the conversion experience. They worked earnestly to distinguish the sheep from the goats within their congregations, worrying that some might be misled by the euphoria of "enthusiasm" into self-deception and false comfort. Speaking broadly, they preached that a true conversion began with the sinner's awakening to his soul's precarious state with regard to eternal life (hence sermons that emphasized the torments of hell); passed through a phase of "humiliation" in which the sinner recognized his absolute unworthiness and the total inadequacy of his own efforts to achieve salvation (sometimes described as achieving a willingness to be damned for the glory of God); and ended through the grace of God, with an immediate appreciation of divine things that signified saving faith.

By 1737, when Edwards's account of Northampton's transformation was published in England, the embers of the so-called frontier revival were long cold. Nevertheless, like the latter rain, Edwards's *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* fell into a world primed for a revival of "heart religion." The account took on a life of its own. An edition was promptly published in Scotland and, within a year, another appeared in German translation. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, read the *Narrative* with admiration months after his own conversion and shortly turned it into a Methodist staple. Under the preaching of George Whitefield, the first great itinerant evangelist of modern times, a member of the Wesleyan circle, and another admirer of the *Narrative*, revivals spread through England and even reached the worldly precincts of London. From Edwards's surprising work of God, revivals were on their way to becoming a more predictable work of man.

In 1738, when Whitefield first brought his flamboyant, even theatrical, style of preaching to the southern colonies, he was already a celebrity, a rock star *avant la lettre*. In a series of visits, Whitefield slowly widened his orbit, reaching New England during the fall of 1740 with a six-week whirlwind tour. Everywhere he

preached, the crowds were enormous and the results tumultuous. In mid-October—on his way to visit Edwards and preach in Northampton—Whitefield bade his farewell to thirty thousand people on Boston Common, probably the largest crowd ever assembled in colonial America. From 1740 to 1743, religious excitement maintained its fevered pitch throughout New England, but Whitefield's methods brought controversy. For one thing, instead of the traditional stages of spiritual struggle played out in the context of a settled parish ministry, the 1740s revival saw instantaneous conversions with ecstatic emotional raptures, not to mention the occasional indecorous physical effects. While even sympathetic observers admitted that these "impressions" might well be products of the imagination rather than "impulses from above," those less favorably inclined saw the twin specters of religious "enthusiasm" and "antinomianism"—both fighting words since the earliest days of the Reformation.

Equally important, Whitefield and the crop of itinerants that followed in his wake seemed determined to replay the fifth century's Donatist crisis—in which believers contended that sacraments administered by unfaithful priests were invalid—in the context of eighteenth-century New England, regularly inveighing against the dangers of an "unconverted ministry." As Whitefield pointedly remarked, "the reason why Congregations have been so dead, is because dead Men preach to them." More pithily, and with even less tact, one young candidate for the ministry—David Brainerd—announced that his Yale tutor "had no more grace than a chair." He was promptly expelled.

The apogee of denunciation occurred in 1743, when the youthful itinerant James Davenport organized a bonfire of the vanities in New London, and included among the items slated for the flames the works of mainstream evangelical leaders such as Benjamin Colman and Increase Mather. When the dust settled, New England's Standing Order found itself arrayed into two hostile factions, the "Old Lights" who argued that "an enlightened mind and not raised affections ought always to be the guide of those who call themselves men . . . in the affairs of religion as well as other things" and the "New Light" apologists for the revival's experiential religion. Each side claimed with ample reason to be the bearer of the authentic New England tradition. The centrifugal forces unleashed by the awakening would ultimately lead one side into rationalism and Unitarianism and the other into a reinvigorated Calvinist orthodoxy.

Philip Gura, a distinguished scholar of Transcendentalism and the author of an important biography of Edwards, has done a great service in bringing together in a single volume many of Edwards's works arising out of the religious revivals of the 1730s and 1740s. To the modern reader, they highlight a far more accessible aspect of Edwards's oeuvre than the weighty treatises on free will and religious affections that earned Edwards his reputation as a theologian. The bulk of the collection is taken up with Edwards's *Faithful Narrative* (reflecting the first full American edition from 1738), *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (1741), and *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England* (1743). It also contains seven sermons, including both "Justification by Faith Alone" (published 1738, but delivered in the run-up to the 1734 revival) and that anthology staple, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (delivered and published in 1741). It is rounded out with four letters concerning evangelical and pastoral matters and the *Personal Narrative*, an account of Edwards's own religious experiences probably composed in late 1740 at the request of his student and son-in-law Aaron Burr, father of the future Vice President.

Although Gura graces the end of the volume with an excellent note on the texts and a notably thorough chronology of Edwards's life, the collection has significant limitations for the ordinary reader who is not primarily engaging with Edwards's writings from a position of faith. To take the most obvious question first, Gura does not explain why he chose many of these works. For some, like the *Personal Narrative*, the answer is obvious. But for occasional writings, like the letters and sermons, the selection criteria are less clear. Why, for example, does the previously unpublished sermon "The Curse of Meroz" (delivered December 1741 and presented with Edwards's shorthand abbreviations) merit inclusion rather than "A Divine and Supernatural Light" (1733) which conveys Edwards's understanding of the relationship between beauty and a

sense of holiness, an understanding that provided the foundation for both his evangelicalism and reflected his personal religious experience?

Equally important, following the Library of America format, the collection presents the works without historical context apart from that which can be gleaned from the end matter. Although Edwards's meticulous empirical observation of revival phenomena runs through all three of the primary selections, each is aimed at a different audience, embodying different purposes at different stages in what were substantially different religious movements—something that may not be obvious to the non-specialist. While the *Faithful Narrative* reflects Edwards's efforts to publicize the more traditional frontier revival to a broader audience, *The Distinguishing Marks* was an irenic sermon preached in September 1741 at Yale's Commencement, aimed at winning his skeptical alma mater over to the revival and staking his claim to be chief among the apologists for the new awakening. In *Some Thoughts*, an expanded sequel to the Yale sermon, Edwards addressed the fully realized Old Light attack on the revival. It is one salvo in an extended polemic exchange with Boston's Charles Chauncy, reflecting both the hardened divisions among New England's clergy and Edwards's deepened commitment to affective religion.

Beyond the historical value of the collection, perhaps the most striking thing that emerges from this anthology is that the proverbially sober Calvinists of New England nourished a strain of full-blown mysticism. The hope—if not the expectation—of most ordinary believers was for exactly that: a direct and transformative experience of the divine presence. Edwards himself certainly described personal religious transports that stand in the tradition of the great mystics. As he wrote at the time, when he achieved that "inward sweet delight in GOD and divine things" that signified saving faith, "there came into my Soul, and . . . as it were diffused thro' it a Sense of the Glory of the Divine Being, a new Sense quite different from any Thing I ever experienced before. . . . The Sense I had of divine Things, would of a sudden as it were, kindle up a sweet burning in my Heart, an ardor of my Soul, that I know not how to express." In his wife, Sarah Pierpont Edwards, he found a fitting helpmeet. In *Some Thoughts*, Edwards recounted a thinly disguised version of his wife's two-weeks-long spiritual ecstasy in the winter of 1742—raptures that she managed to fit in while taking charge of a house full of guests, a visiting preacher, her seven young children, and assorted servants. A true New Englander, she matter-of-factly reported that she was able to attend to her "worldly business" with "great alacrity," because "it being done thus, 'tis found to be as good as prayer." On one day alone, she began the morning feeling herself "entirely swallowed up in God," totally overcome with a "ravishing sense of the unspeakable joys of the upper world." By bedtime, she was enveloped in a "heavenly elysium," seeming "to float or swim, in these bright, sweet beams of the love of Christ." As the ecstasies continued day after day, neighbors began to fear for her life.

Edwards's own new sense of the divine glory expressed itself in an appreciation of the created world as a manifestation of the divine presence, of God's love to all creation. He perceived the fullness of "God's Excellency . . . in every Thing, in the Sun, Moon and Stars; in the Clouds, and blue Sky; in the Grass, Flowers, Trees; in the Water, and all Nature." As a new convert, he reported that he took delight in solitary walks when he "often used to sit & view the Moon for a long time, and so in the Day time, spent much time in viewing the Clouds & Sky, to behold the sweet Glory of GOD in these things." This sense of divine immanence in nature lends Edwards's writings a lyrical, almost Wordsworthian, cast that extends even to his most workaday productions. For example, in the otherwise conventional sermon "Pressing into the Kingdom of God" (Luke XVI.16), Edwards speaks of John the Baptist as the forerunner of Jesus in a lovely extended metaphor of the natural progression of light: "The old Dispensation was abolished, and the new brought in by Degrees; as the Night gradually ceases, and gives place to the increasing Day, which succeeds in its Room: First the Day Star rises; next follows the light of the Sun Itself, but dimly reflected in the dawning of the day," increasing until "the Day star it self is gradually put out." It is in such passages that the modern reader can most fully appreciate the touchstone of Edwards's theology: "True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections."

Notebook

The outdoor kid

by Stefan Beck

The naturalist John Muir, that great lover of flora and fauna, rock and ice, the natural world in all its grandeur, died a century ago on Christmas Eve. He had been admitted to California Hospital in Los Angeles the day before, wracked by pneumonia. Like many nature-lovers, Muir had courted countless opportunities to "die doing what he loved," as the euphemism goes, whether by freezing on a mountaintop, falling off a cliff, or being eaten by a bear who shared his views on the interdependence of all living things. That he met his end in a hospital bed is not such a tragedy; Muir was, in fact, doing something he loved at the time, working on the manuscript of his memoir *Travels in Alaska* (1915).

The journeys described in that book furnish most of the subject matter of Kim Heacox's entertaining, albeit overly politicized, biography, *John Muir and the Ice That Started a Fire: How a Visionary and the Glaciers of Alaska Changed America*, published earlier this year.[1] Alaska also furnished Muir's best-loved work, *Stickeen* (1909), first published in *The Century Magazine* as "An Adventure With a Dog and a Glacier" in 1897. "Adventure" was putting it mildly. What the story recounts is another of those near-death experiences, in this case, with the titular terrier mutt on a treacherous glacier in Taylor Bay.

Heacox's book is a fine introduction to John Muir's life, work, and legacy, but *Stickeen* is an ideal one. Heacox provides deeper insight into what is well known about his subject. Muir was ensorcelled by birds and forests. He was an avid student of glaciers and their behavior. He was a pioneering preservationist, who befriended and influenced Theodore Roosevelt and the nature writer John Burroughs; he quarreled with Gifford Pinchot, the first head of the Forest Service. Muir was responsible in large part for some of our most marvelous National Parks, including Yosemite and Sequoia. He tried and failed to save Yosemite's Hetch Hetchy Valley. He founded the Sierra Club.

Nevertheless, only Muir's writing—and *Stickeen* is a standout in this regard—can evoke Muir's mysticism, his unusually strong identification with the natural world, and the awe and exultation he felt whenever in the midst of it:

> That [Stickeen] should have recognized and appreciated the danger at the first glance showed wonderful sagacity. Never before had the daring midget seemed to know that ice was slippery or that there was any such thing as danger anywhere. His looks and tones of voice when he began to complain and speak his fears were so human that I unconsciously talked to him in sympathy as I would to a frightened boy. . . . "Hush your fears, my boy," I said, "we will get across safe, though it is not going to be easy. No right way is easy in this rough world. We must risk our lives to save them. At the worst we can only slip, and then how grand a grave we will have, and by and by our nice bones will do good in the terminal moraine."

1 *John Muir and the Ice That Started a Fire*, by Kim Heacox; Globe Pequot Press, 264 pages, $25.95.

It is also the case that only Muir's writing can evoke Muir's writing. He is remembered chiefly for serving as a custodian of the American landscape, for being an early champion of preservation, but Muir is just as valuable as a writer. That his books' "characters" are, as often as not, flowers, animals, streams, or sheets of forbidding ice may tax the concentration of readers accustomed to such things as conflict and plot. Yet, by presenting this challenge his books teach precisely the kind of attention and patience that one needs to appreciate nature in anything like the manner that Muir did. As another nature lover, Paul Rezendes, put it in his textbook *Tracking and the Art of Seeing* (1999), "The tracker in the forest is in love with his or her surroundings. In nature, we are open to a larger perspective of self." Love and a "larger perspective" are exactly what pervade Muir's animated and, at times, ecstatic sentences.

Kim Heacox's biography of Muir should be read by anyone who cares about the outdoors, whether or not he is interested in Muir. It is easy to forget that America's treasured wild places have not been set aside simply because they are too big and beautiful to be spoiled. It took the intercession of men like Muir to ensure that a nation bent on expansion and prosperity did not treat these resources in a shortsighted way. Heacox renders a personality stubborn and strange enough to tackle that task. He is also an excellent travel writer, even if the travels in question are not his own; in his hands, Muir's Alaskan sojourns take on the quality of legend.

Muir, Heacox writes, "was the Johann Wolfgang von Goethe of his day, a holistic thinker who challenged the modern scientific revolution to find a balance between the rational, quantitative mind and the intuitive, qualitative mind." Muir believed that scientific inquiry "requires *experience*, a deep knowing and sense of wonder that comes from being out there, barefoot in the meadow, alone on the ice, naked in the storm." Heacox presents a Muir in ragged clothes, extravagantly bearded, eating only stale crusts of bread and venturing out into ice-choked waters with Tlingit Indians. Muir trusted his curiosity and instinct more completely than the Tlingits trusted their own canoes:

> Even brave old Toyatte, dreading the treeless, forlorn appearance of the region, said that his heart was not strong, and that he feared his canoe, on the safety of which our lives depended, might be entering a skookum-house (jail) of ice, from which there might be no escape; while the Hoona guide said bluntly that if I was so fond of danger, and meant to go close up to the noses of the ice-mountains, he would not consent to go any farther.

Muir, like Patrick White's Voss or Werner Herzog's Aguirre, persuaded the men to follow. In this case, their faith was rewarded—by not dying. But it is clear from Heacox's telling that Muir was a bit of a lunatic. He once told a man he had asked for directions out of San Francisco that he wanted to go "anywhere that is wild"; it is clear that to Muir "wild" meant not only unspoiled but also unpredictable or dangerous. Many would regard Muir's behavior as selfish and reckless. Still, there are places one cannot penetrate under ideal conditions without being reckless, natural wonders that are sealed off forever from those who are not fearless. Heacox's book is a tribute to one of those rare birds who would not take *oh no* for an answer.

Heacox's narrative follows Muir and his band of explorers, including the Presbyterian missionary S. Hall Young, on their interactions with Alaskan natives and Alaskan glaciers. (Muir, at times playing the pantheist missionary, is playfully described as a "Druid priest.") We travel with Muir in Glacier Bay, which became its own National Park and is the home of Muir Glacier. We watch with amusement as Muir becomes an unlikely father of cruise-ship tourism, and with pride as, on his own steam, he earns recognition as a glacial geologist. Yet we never lose the sense that a sort of benign madness was Muir's greatest asset, and that no truly sane person could love nature with anything approaching his ardor.

How, then, does one *become* John Muir? He bequeathed us a blueprint in his 1913 *Story of My Boyhood and Youth*. Muir was born April 21, 1838 in Dunbar, Scotland, and there, by his account, he divided his time between being

thrashed at home, being thrashed at school, thrashing and getting thrashed by other boys, and—improbably, given all this "disorder and din"—developing a fondness for birds to rival St. Francis's. Muir's curiosity about the natural world was keen: "We used to wonder how the woodpeckers could bore holes so perfectly round, true mathematical circles. We ourselves could not have done it with gouges and chisels."

He did not paint his young self as a saint, however, in all of his dealings with animals. Having acknowledged the "natural savagery of boys," he confessed to complicity in dropping a terrified cat from a window (it lived), to watching dog-fights, to playing spectator at the butchering of pigs. "[I]f the butcher was good-natured," he wrote, "we begged him to let us get a near view of the mysterious insides and to give us a bladder to blow up for a football." He came to understand the "humanity" in animals gradually, which is to say honestly, by careful observation—and there were many opportunities for that after the next turn young Muir's life would take.

In 1849, Muir's father took him to America, bought an eighty-acre wilderness in Marquette County, Wisconsin, and established a farm. Muir learned to ride a pony; to tell venomous from harmless snakes; to fish (for "pickerel, sunfish, black bass, perch, shiners, pumpkinseeds") and hunt; to swim; to identify flowers, plants, and insects. (Muir is best read with a Google Image Search open.) He devotes a chapter of *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth* to birds, and reminisces about the late, great passenger pigeon, quoting Pokagon, an Indian writer, on its golden age: "I saw one nesting-place in Wisconsin one hundred miles long and from three to ten miles wide."

If this sounds impossibly idyllic, bear in mind that what Muir mostly did is work. The Muir farm raised wheat, corn, potatoes, and melons, and of course kept horses and cattle. If spring with its plowing and summer with its harvesting, corn-hoeing, scythe-grinding, cattle-feeding, wood-splitting, and water-carrying sound difficult, consider the image Muir gives us of winter mornings, everyone's "soggy boots frozen solid." With no time to waste on such luxuries as a fire, the family "had to squeeze our throbbing, aching, chilblained feet into [boots], causing greater pain than toothache, and hurry to our chores." Here, one guesses, is the origin of the adult Muir's celebrated tolerance for bad weather.

Muir's childhood was defined by unmediated exposure to nature, with precious little to distract from it save books; the boy Muir, both a dedicated reader and a prodigious inventor, once devised an alarm clock so that he could rise at one o'clock in the morning to read. Surely, this enforced attention to natural detail, combined with a self-guided education in classic literature—Shakespeare, Milton, and Cowper were among Muir's favorites—accounts for the richness and beauty of his prose.

Muir could paint a cloud as lovely as anything produced by Frederic Edwin Church: One "resembled a fungus, with a bulging base like a sequoia, a smooth, tapering stalk, and a round, bossy, down-curled head like a mushroom—stalk, head, and root, in equal, glowing, half-transparent crimson" ("Yosemite Valley in Flood," *The Overland Monthly*, April 1872). His dry wit savors of Twain. An elaborate description of a shepherd's filthy clothes in *My First Summer in the Sierra* (1911) is worth reading in full; it ends with: "These precious overalls are never taken off, and nobody knows how old they are, though one may guess by their thickness and concentric structure. Instead of wearing thin they wear thick, and in their stratification have no small geological significance."

The kind of upbringing that produced John Muir is rarer today. We have phrases like "outdoor kid" and "free-range kid" for children who encounter the outdoors on vastly gentler terms than Muir did. Yet we have no shortage of eco-activists who model themselves on Muir at his crankiest. After an accident on a mountain, Muir thundered at his feet, "[T]hat is what you get by intercourse with stupid town stairs, and dead pavements" ("A Geologist's Winter Walk," *The Overland Monthly*, April 1873). In *My First Summer in the Sierra*, he sneers at "another party of Yosemite tourists" who "seem to care but little for the glorious objects about them." For "but little," read "less than I do." This dismissal of civilization, even

if it is a joke, and of people with different passions or priorities, is far from charming.

Man's needs must be weighed prudently against the needs of nature, and it seems wisest to raise children who fall at a comfortable midpoint between contempt for, or indifference to, nature and messianic devotion to it. The scolding and doomsaying of too many of Muir's philosophical heirs are surely as apt to put people off nature as to encourage a love of it. Heacox's biography is an occasional offender in this regard, as when he asserts, with evident relish, that "while we cannot live without the forces and creatures of the nonhuman world, they can live without us."

This perverse delight in the superfluity of our species is not unusual among today's environmentalists. Is it an attempt to chasten us? A warning? If evolution is indifferent, then no condition it produces can be deemed better or worse than any other; there can be no condition that is *supposed to be* and, thus, no obligation on our part to maintain it. If man is destructive, the immutable laws of nature have made him so. Protection of the environment is reduced by this attitude to a question of aesthetics, of preference—of *human* preference, and not even unanimous preference. Man wiping out everything and man wiping himself out, or even putting himself out, to save everything are equally meaningless.

It seems the anthropocentrism of the unbeliever is every bit as irrational and arrogant as the anthropocentrism of a medieval Christian, or of Muir, a believer in his own way. We will have to go on teaching our children that what they do with nature is up to them, and that there are no right or wrong answers, but we might at least furnish them with a field guide like John Muir to assist in that solemn enterprise.

Letters

A controversial comparison

To the Editors:
Conrad Black I rate as a good friend, but I am shocked by a grave misrepresentation of my views on Napoleon in his critique of Andrew Roberts's *Napoleon: The Great* ("The great soldier–statesman," November 2014). He lumps me in with other "familiar historians" guilty of equating Napoleon with Adolf Hitler.

This is the exact reverse of my views. If I may quote from my most recent book on the subject, *The Age of Napoleon* (Weidenfeld 2004, p. 2):

> Parallels have frequently been drawn between Hitler and Napoleon, the two great warlords. But they are spurious. In terms of civil, non-military accomplishments, Hitler after twelve years in power bequeathed to Germany nothing but a mountain of skulls and rubble. Napoleon, on the other hand, had he never fought a single battle, would still have to be rated one of history's great leaders for the system of administration and the civil reforms he left behind him in France.

I know Conrad has read the passage (he has read every book on Napoleon!), and, with his legendary memory for the written page, it is all the more puzzling that he should commit such an inaccurate, and, indeed, rather damaging assertion.

Sir Alistair Horne
Oxfordshire, UK

Conrad Black replies:
I warmly reciprocate Sir Alistair Horne's goodwill. I have read his excellent books on Napoleon and other periods in French history, and I have thought that he held Napoleon almost entirely responsible for the continuation of war from 1803 to 1814. This is Andrew Roberts's view of Sir Alistair's work also, a fact that influenced my reference to Sir Alistair in my review of Mr. Roberts's new biography of Napoleon in *The New Criterion* in November, which Sir Alistair found objectionable. I had thought he assimilated Napoleon to Hitler as Sir Max Hastings and Paul Johnson have, because he regarded him as an inveterate war-monger, a view that Mr. Roberts and I do not share. I don't think even the Hastings–Johnson view, though extremely hostile to Napoleon, considers him morally indistinguishable from Hitler, just responsible also for the unnecessary deaths of a very large number of innocent people. This has been the prevailing view of British historians and British opinion generally, though there are prominent dissenters, including Mr. Roberts. I have found nine references to Hitler in Sir Alistair's *Age of Napoleon*, and fifteen references to Hitler in his *How Far to Austerlitz*, and a number of these references raise questions on this point. Of course I accept Sir Alistair's clarification of his views and I apologize if I have mistakenly traduced him.